

## Come and Have Breakfast – Ben Wayman

John 21:1-19

I love breakfast. I don't know if it's the coffee or the food or the time of day with all its freshness and potential. But I do know that breakfast is always better with friends. Eggs and bacon over a campfire with the Amundsons, Caribou coffee on the patio with Cole, chicken and waffles at Goody Goody Diner with Tim, breakfast burritos and coffee at The Mud House with Dro—all were sacred times. And I can think of many, many more. Whether it's eggs and bacon, chicken and waffles, or fish and bread, breakfast creates intimacy like few other experiences.

When Jesus invites the disciples in John 21 to *Come and have breakfast*, we should understand here an invitation to intimacy that far exceeds the *Come and see* invitation repeated countless times in John's Gospel. *Come and see* is transformed here into an offer of deep friendship: *Come and have breakfast*. This morning we get to explore what's changed since Jesus' invitation in chapter 1 to his disciples to *Come and see*.

Many scholars think chapter 20 was the real ending of John, but today we see why chapter 21 is necessary to tie up all the loose ends.

The major loose thread that is never resolved until chapter 21 is what becomes of Peter, the disciple who denied Jesus. John's gospel takes a special interest in Peter from the very first chapter and features him prominently in the footwashing of chapter 13. Shortly after Jesus washes Peter's feet and during the farewell meal, Jesus tells Peter he is incapable of following him and predicts Peter will deny him three times. It's there that Jesus says to Peter: *Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward* (13:36b). Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial and his mysterious promise that Peter will only be able to follow him *afterward* is not resolved until the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter. And this story is our story today.

Today we find Peter and six other disciples out at sea, fishing, catching nothing. They're stuck on a boat getting skunked. It's a strange story not only because a similar version appears in Luke's gospel near the beginning of Jesus' ministry, but also because it's not clear whether John wants us to interpret their fishing as a regression to their life before Jesus. That they caught nothing is suggestive, but you never know with John. John's gospel is symbolically loaded and has captured the imaginations of the church's greatest thinkers for the past two thousand years. The meaning of the 153 fish, for example, remains a mystery to this day.

But today, I'd like to focus on just one thing: reconciliation. I'd like to take Jesus as our model for what reconciliation is and what it makes possible.

Last week Ruth pointed out that Jesus's words, *Peace be with you*, to the disciples in the second and third resurrection appearances have set the tone for the longstanding Christian practice of passing the peace. Passing the peace is the beginning of reconciliation.

And today we discover that reconciliation involves at least three things.

First, it requires going to the very person who wronged you. How humiliating. Betrayal is one of the most painful experiences we can ever have, because it exposes our frailty. We are betrayed by people we trusted—by our family, by our friends, by people with whom we have been vulnerable. Betrayal is only possible because we let our guards down. Betrayal is what happened to Jesus.

We often respond to betrayal by trying desperately to preserve our remaining dignity by either demanding our betrayer come to us for forgiveness, or by abandoning the friendship altogether. But Jesus does neither. Instead, he goes to the one who denied him and initiates reconciliation. He goes to the one who betrayed him. It's really an incredible thing. It defies everything we learn in Leadership 101. What manager would seek to rehire employees who dumped him for his competitor? Reconciliation rescues us from pride. By going to those who hurt him, Jesus teaches us to value reconciliation over its counterfeits. Personal dignity is not a Christian virtue.

So, first, reconciliation requires we forgo demands on the one who hurt us and initiate reconciliation ourselves. Once we learn this, we begin to see that it's God who makes reconciliation possible. Jesus provides fish and bread on the campfire and asks the disciples to bring their fish—the very same fish Jesus has himself provided—so that they can enjoy breakfast together. By hosting a meal to feed his sheep, Jesus models for Peter and us what God does for his friends. God gives us everything we need to be his friends and eat with him. Reconciliation is from beginning to end, an act of God's generosity. When we think we are bringing something to the table, we forget that God has given us everything we have. It's all gift. God's friendship is the greatest gift we'll ever receive. Once we get over ourselves, we can get on to the friendships God so richly offers us.

So the second thing we learn about reconciliation is that Jesus gives us everything we need to become friends with God and one another. He helps us get over our petty grudges and damaged egos so that we can receive the healing embrace of God and each other.

The third thing Jesus shows us is that there is no reconciliation without truth. After Jesus fed his disciples, he asked Peter three times whether he loved him. Early Christians were right to see this threefold questioning as a match to Peter's threefold denial. But they also saw that by honestly speaking to Peter—and not just 'forgiving and forgetting'—Jesus provided Peter the space for a threefold confession of love (Jerome). According to St. Ambrose, the great Italian preacher and mentor of St. Augustine, by telling the truth to Peter about his betrayal, Jesus made it possible for Peter to experience a threefold restoration. Telling the truth is often painful, as we see here with Peter, but it's necessary if we are to become the kind of people capable of following Jesus.

And this is exactly what reconciliation makes possible. Now that Peter has been reconciled to Jesus, he is able, for the first time, to follow Jesus. I began this sermon noting that Jesus predicted not only that Peter would deny him, but also that he would only be able to follow him *afterward*. Now is the *afterward*. Now that Peter has been sought out by Jesus, received God's extravagant embrace, and accepted the truth about his betrayal, he is empowered and invited to follow Jesus. John's gospel teaches us that following Jesus is impossible without friendship with God and one another. Following

Jesus is not a feat for heroic women and men of outrageous virtue. Following Jesus is a gift, and it's made possible through the friendship God offers us in Christ.

In his recent visit to Greenville College, early Christian scholar Justo González explained that the Incarnation was God's plan all along. It's not God's patch-up for our clumsy fall and stubborn rebellion. The Incarnation—God-with-us in Jesus—was God's plan from the start, because God always wanted us to be his intimate friends. The Incarnation makes possible the kind of friendship with God where we can eat breakfast with him forever.

Without God's friendship and the friendship of one another, we cannot follow Jesus to the cross. It's not that it's too hard, though it surely is; but without constant communion with God and one another we lack the resources to become the people of God. We need each other to follow Jesus. That's why our reconciliation is absolutely essential to our friendship with God. We don't get to hold grudges. We don't get to keep score. We don't get to choose not to pass the peace with our roommate, or husband, or mom, or former boss. We have to reconcile, because without reconciliation we will be stuck on a boat getting skunked.

Today we discover that reconciliation is resurrection. If we remain at odds with God and one another, we will be dead: strangers to God and shadows of what we are created to be. In his comments on this story in John, St. Augustine shows us how reconciliation is the stuff of resurrection. He says: "When Christ died in his passion, Peter died by his denial. Christ the Lord was raised from the dead, and out of his love he raised Peter." (Sermon 229, Works of St. Augustine 3, 6:320)

In a moment, we will be invited to *Come and have breakfast*. And when we do, we will be raised from the dead and become closer friends with God and each another.