

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year C  
May 1, 2022  
St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Sarah Chancellor-Watson  
John 21:1-19

### “Discipleship Revisited”

The more I read the stories of Jesus in the gospels, the more I’m convinced that Jesus’ love language is food. It seems to me that least one of the main ways he shows and demonstrates love is through food or a meal – his first miracle was turning water into wine, he fed crowds of thousands with a little bread and fish, he often demonstrated the radical inclusivity of God’s kingdom by dining with tax collectors, prostitutes, and other unseemly sinners, and here he makes a post-resurrection appearance to his disciples and shares breakfast with them on the beach.

Now, we’re not told how many days after the resurrection this story takes place, but some time has passed for Peter, Thomas, James, John, Nathaniel and a couple of the other disciples to return home to Galilee from their locked room in Jerusalem. Peter suggests that they go fishing – returning to an activity that was familiar and comfortable, perhaps in an attempt to find some peace after the events in Jerusalem. Maybe it was a way for Peter to begin to process all that happened to them in the past three years. After fishing all night they come up empty handed. Come morning, Jesus appears on the beach, and even though this is the third time he has appeared to them after his resurrection they still don’t recognize him. Jesus calls out to those in boat, suggesting that they cast their nets on the other side. Suddenly, their nets are so full of fish they cannot bring them, the ropes strain with the weight of the enormous catch but they do not break. When it does finally dawn on one of the disciples that it’s Jesus on the beach, he calls out “It’s the Lord.” Peter dives into the water, springing into action – very typical of Peter to leap first, think later!

Jesus often illustrates complex spiritual concepts with simple ordinary items and actions. We see this through his teachings, as he often used parables to describe what the Kingdom of God was like, and also through his miracles, through his actions of love in healing. Jesus in his appearance on the beach is inviting the disciples to live into the resurrection life found in him. Even though they have been following Jesus for the past few years, learning at his feet and performing miracles in his name, on this side of the resurrection it seems that discipleship must be revisited. This life that Jesus is calling them once again to is so new and foreign to them, that they *still* don’t recognize the resurrected Christ when he is in their presence. How are they to live this new life if they don’t even know what it looks like? So once again, Jesus must demonstrate what he means in both simple actions and in impressive miracles. First, he demonstrates God’s abundant love by the just absurd amount of fish caught in their nets and then he invites them to come and share in a meal with him. He tells them to bring what they have to this meal – the fish they have just caught – and he will provide the rest. It is in the context of abundance, generosity and self-giving, and community where Jesus commissions his followers to the resurrection life of discipleship.

In the earliest church communities the symbols used to depict the sacrament of the Lord's Supper – one of the first acts that became ritualized in this new community – are not bread and a chalice or grapes like we might associate with the cup of wine representing Christ's blood, but it's actually depictions of fish and bread – recalling the themes of abundance and providence found in this story and many others in the gospels. We continue to remember God's abundant love and all the ways we are provided for whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist. In our worship we too are called by Jesus to the table, to the meal, which he has prepared, bringing what we have and all that we are. Here we are fed, by Christ's own hands through the power of the Holy Spirit, where we remember that even in a small piece of bread and a little grape juice, we are given more than enough.

But this meal is only one half of what the resurrection life of discipleship looks like. The other half is illustrated by Jesus' conversation with Peter. After appearing to the disciples already 2 other times, here Peter finally gets his chance to have a heart to heart with Jesus and seek forgiveness for his shameful denial. A denial, I will clarify, that was not about not knowing Jesus, but about denying being one of his disciples. Jesus gives Peter the chance to reclaim his identity as one of his followers by asking him first if he loves him, and then to put that love in action by "feeding and tending his sheep."

The life that Jesus is calling Peter to is so wonderful and powerful and transformative that pretty soon Peter won't even recognize himself, but that doesn't mean it's easy and he won't run up against the road blocks that Jesus encountered as he shared the same message of God's kingdom that he is now entrusting to Peter and the other disciples. Jesus' campfire-side chat with Peter ends with an ominous prophecy, a prediction of his death at the hands of the same powers and institutions who killed Jesus. Jesus reveals to Peter one final piece of the puzzle for what discipleship looks like – taking up this mantle will cost him everything.

None of us are perfect disciples ourselves. More times than we care to admit we, like Peter, deny our identity as Jesus' disciples and fail to live into the resurrection life that Jesus has promised us. And like Peter we give into fear - fear of failure, fear of the cost, fear of change, fear of losing control of our lives, and so we need Jesus to once again show up, take us by the hand, feed us a meal, and remind us - first of how much we are loved and then how to love Jesus in return by loving others.

The good news is, and I mean the really Good News, is that again and again we called back – to the table, to the meal, to the community, to the resurrection life of discipleship. We, like the disciples in this story have to hear the call to follow Jesus more than once. Sometimes discipleship just needs to be revisited. Jesus lovingly returns us to our vocational calling as messengers of God's kingdom. And sometimes, like Peter we are asked over and over again – "Do you love me?" where our commission is the same to bring what we have and go out and tend to the lost, the outcast, the oppressed, the lonely, the ones in need. Friends let us live the resurrection life of discipleship together - Let us be fed at the table of grace with Christ's abundant love, and then let us go – go out and feed Christ's sheep.