

John 21:1-14

Theme: The welcome of Jesus

A companion is one with whom you eat your bread. In many cultures, the act of eating together is deeply meaningful. In modern restaurants, we sit near strangers, eat without saying a word to them, and leave. In Jesus' culture, eating together was an almost sacred sign of peace, trust, and mutual respect. To open your home was to offer the goodness of everything you have with the understanding the other would never do anything to violate the trust. In feudal Japan, samurai left their swords outside the teahouse, honoring the sacredness of hospitality. In Palestine in Jesus' day, sharing a meal together was an almost sacred act of mutual respect.

This is why the Pharisees were so repulsed by Jesus for regularly eating with the sinners. They mistook his grace and welcoming spirit for blanket approval of every sin those sinners did instead of love for them. This is also why Jesus when eating in the home of a Pharisee, was sure to point out that none of the customary, almost sacred things were done for him: no water feet, no kiss. What kind of welcome and companionship was that? False welcome. Not so with Jesus. His hospitality was real, even on the shore of the Sea of Galilee in the pre-dawn moments of early day. There, Jesus appeared to his disciples the third time. There, Jesus put them at ease showing true welcome and love they could clearly see in their risen Lord, in their friend, Jesus.

Galilee. The lake. This was home away from Jerusalem's threats, closer to family. Jesus told them he'd meet them here. John lists a group of seven: Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the Sons of Zebedee, James and John, and two unnamed others. Notable group: Peter denied Jesus three times; Thomas, who doubted Jesus rose; Nathanael skeptically scoffed, "Can anything good come from Nazareth??"; James and John instigated arguments among the disciples about who was greatest, assumed they were, and who even got their mom to ask Jesus for seats of honor. A denier, a doubter, a skeptic, and a couple glory chasers. It's these guys, disciples for three years, but probably longtime friends who now shared a common experience that would have bonded them together with each other and Jesus.

When things go as expected, it gives us a feeling of control over lives, we feel secure. When things go awry, when the illusory bubble of control pops, what then? We often default to things we think we still can control. For Peter, this meant fishing. "*I'm going out to fish,*" (**John 21:3**) he announced and everyone tagged along. Maybe he thought he was gonna do this for the rest of his life. Maybe he was waiting for Jesus to show up and losing lines, the familiar feeling of ropes in his hands, prepping nets, and hauling them in was just the thing to put his mind at ease. Solid plan until he didn't catch anything. This is relatable. Stressed out, things beyond ya, so you do a calming thing.

Pulling them out of what reverie they have been in was Jesus standing on the beach, only they couldn't tell it was him, asking if they'd caught anything. "Nothing." For a second time, Jesus gave unconventional fishing advice, "*Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.*" (**John 21:6**) They did and the net filled right up with large fish. Recalling a similar experience, John exclaimed, "*It is the Lord!*" (**John 21:7**) Peter leapt into the water, cloak around his waist, swimming 100 yards to be as close to Jesus as soon as possible. The others followed in the boat dragging the net.

What they saw when they got to shore was just as baffling as the catch of fish, "*When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.*" (**John 21:9**) Jesus didn't need them to catch fish for him. As the Lord almighty and victor over death, all things are under his control. He had charcoal going with fish sizzling over it and some bread. Jesus is communicating to them in a visceral way that he loves them and always will. No care is too small or insignificant to him. He gave his life for them on the cross, he's gonna feed them now. He rose for their everlasting lives, he's gonna welcome

them into his presence and offer to them all the goodness of his Father's house. He does the same for us. Jesus doesn't confront, he invites, he incorporates. He asked these disciples to bring over their catch, he wants their involvement in whatever he's up to. Inclusion like that from a highly respected person makes us feel valued and appreciated. Simon Peter certainly felt it! Like a Labrador in the most flattering way, he brought the miraculously untorn net over by himself.

Jesus' invitation was simple, "*Come and have breakfast.*" (**John 21:12**) No blame from Jesus for the denier, the doubter, the skeptic. No rebuke for failed chasers of glory. Just breakfast. Jesus doesn't lecture or shake his head in disappointment letting fly an, "I told you so!" with smug self-satisfaction, as we often do. Just welcome. Just grace. Just love. He wanted to spend time with his companions, his buddies, even in his glory he still wants their company because he's a person. This meal showed them so and put them at ease. They might have been holding their breath, waiting for Jesus to let them have it. None of that though, just friends eating together, just a simple breakfast of bread and fish, which I'm sure if cooked by Jesus, was outstanding.

Ever the servant Jesus is, even in glory! His caring savior's heart never changes! The humble and Good Shepherd sees to every need of his sheep and, in this particular instance, shows clearly Psalm 23 is as literal as it gets! He's led them to quiet waters, sat them down, prepared a table before them, but most of all restores their souls giving assurance that his goodness and love will follow them and that they'll dwell in his house forever.

With Jesus, things are as they should be. There's peace, there's care, there's restoration. With him, there's joy. Even for Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, and John. Even for you. Jesus doesn't keep you around because you've earned your place! He keeps us near, as his own, because he loves us, has forgiven, and restored us. He wants us to walk with him, sit with him, serve alongside him. He's not looking for perfection, that comes from him only. He's looking for people who've been humbled, who know how good and needed it is to be forgiven, who've learned how not strong they are on their own, but who've been made strong in his mercy. This is who shares his grace best. This is you, this is me. People who've denied, doubted, been skeptical, were in it for the glory. People who've needed to hear, again and again, "You are forgiven."

This is who Jesus welcomes, who he works with, calls, and sends. Jesus welcomes you, always, to be with him, where he is, because there is grace, healing, and hope. There is companionship with Jesus. He wants to be with you and is your friend. Really. He wants to do life with you, walk with you through failure, and sit with you when you're afraid. He sends you his Spirit and love. Such love and friendship from Jesus do you have that you can now be his warmth and welcome, inviting others to taste and see clearly, that he, the risen and living Lord Jesus, is good. Amen.