

Back into Relationship – Fish on the Fire

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year C: Easter 3: John 21:1-19

¹ After [he appeared to his followers in Jerusalem,] Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” ⁶ He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone

else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.”¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

God is always inviting us back into relationship by caring for us even in our sin. We then, are called to invite others into relationship by caring for them.

God's invitational grace and mercy be upon us all. Amen.

Alright, I know we have some fishermen and fisherwomen out there! What are the best water holes for fishing around here? Shout them out, don't be shy!

Fabulous...great fishing places. When you are out on the lake do other fishermen and fisherwomen give advice to one another? Do they tell you where the fish are biting?

They did in Jesus' day. Commercial fishing was common and often done along the shoreline where the waters were warmer overnight and early morning. Strangers would shout from the shore, giving advice to fishermen. In that day, trust of friends and strangers could mean the difference between a good day's catch and income, verses not.

Thus, when the disciples saw a stranger who told them to put their nets on the right side of the boat, it wasn't unusual. When they did, what a haul they took in! 153 to be exact. It was the sign they needed to know it was Jesus. God can use anything to reveal Godself to us. Fish. Bread. A parking space. A conversation. A faithful servant. A song on the radio.

Even though there were already fish on the fire, Jesus invites Peter to bring the huge catch of fish in. Then He invites them all to eat... “Come and have breakfast.” He took the bread and gave it to them, He took the fish and gave it to them.

Food is social. Eating is social. It's one thing we still do together with family, friends, even strangers in restaurants. Meals build trust and relationships. A woman would always serve corn on the cob whenever she had people over for the first time who didn't know each other. Because there is no way to be cool with butter running down your fingers, and corn bits in your teeth! It always brought laughter and broke the ice.

Does Jesus' invitation and meal sound familiar? It does, as the last time in John's Gospel Jesus ate with the disciples was the Last Supper. But here they are again, gathered around food at God's invitation. Eating.

So much has happened since that last meal. These men have seen death and the cross. They've betrayed Jesus and ran away. They've hid together in fear. Then they saw the resurrected Lord and the marks of the nails. They've recommitted themselves to the mission and to one another. So much has changed. But the invitation has not. Then it was, 'Here is bread, here is wine.'

Now... "Here, have bread. Here, enjoy some fish." Mackerel and pita might not be our first choice for breakfast, but if you're sitting down with Jesus, nothing else matters. Right? Because He is God. And God just invited you to eat with Him.

In word and deed, Jesus is inviting the disciples and particularly Peter back into relationship with Him. He is rebuilding the trust that has been broken and lost since they last ate together. *God is always inviting us back into relationship by caring for us even in our sin. (repeat)*

It's pretty challenging to have a nice meal with someone you are in conflict with. We've seen the James Bond movies where someone is wary of drinking poisoned wine. There's tension. Hard words. But you and I don't live in James Bond movies. Often, due to the shared activity of corn on the cob or spaghetti falling off forks, laughter comes and it gets easier. Trust is rebuilt little by little. "Do you want dessert?" "Yes, please!"

God is always inviting us back into relationship, showing God trusts us. Jesus needed the disciples to know, despite everything that happened, He trusted them. He needed them to carry on the work.

Which is why Jesus calls Peter aside, for perhaps the very first, 'come to Jesus meeting.' We remember Peter had denied knowing the Lord three times by another charcoal fire. Peter has not forgotten, yet Jesus again shows there is a relationship by asking three times. "Do you love me?" Peter, in his shame or guilt, continues to say he loves the Lord. Which brings Jesus to remind Peter of the calling; Peter's calling and ours as well. Tending to and feeding God's sheep...God's children.

In spite of our shortcomings and imperfections God will continue to use us to further the kingdom. We are not called to hoard this incredible relationship and

Good News all to ourselves. We are called to share it with others, by loving them as Jesus did.

What starts here...an open Communion table...anyone can eat and hear forgiveness of their sins...anyone. It doesn't matter what sins you or the world think you committed. It doesn't matter what labels you or the world has put on you. This is God's table, and what is served up is love and forgiveness. Grace isn't offered on the menu at Chick Fil-a or Perkins. It is here.

So if God doesn't put restrictions on this table, why do we put restrictions on including others? Jesus pulled Peter back into the fold. Do you love me? Then go and serve in my name. Tend my sheep.

We called to invite others into relationship by caring for them, in real and tangible ways. Ways that honor them. Ways that build trust. In a few moments we will celebrate Carol McDivitt's work with World Hunger. ELCA World Hunger has a model of accompaniment. Missionaries don't go into a culture assuming they know what is best. Local farmers tell the missionaries about their weather, their challenges. Women share their dreams about a soap making business, or a mid-wife birthing center.

You and I don't have to go to a foreign country. We have neighbors. Ask a person about themselves. Share a meal. Earn their trust. Then share that God is a loving God of forgiveness and grace. Jesus commissioned Peter. He commissions us to tend and feed God's sheep. Amen.