

“Come”

Introduction: In our adult Sunday school class over these last couple of Sundays, Jan Carlberg has been having us consider “four-letter words.” Not the kind of words you might hear on a playground, but those simple yet profound words the Spirit fills with meaning, words such as love, help, walk, look, rest, sing, and so forth.

I had this in my mind as I was reflecting on our text for this morning, the next post-resurrection account of Jesus that we find in John’s gospel, and the four-letter word that stood out to me is the word “come.” We talk a great deal, it seems, about a little two-letter word that Jesus uses: “go!” And Jesus certainly makes it clear that our role is to go and share the good news. As the famous words of his Great Commission begin: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations . . .” (Ma. 28:18f). But do we recognize that before Jesus says “go,” he says “come?” Even more intriguingly, in this morning’s text he says “Come, and have breakfast.” The risen Lord, it seems, has become a short order cook! Let’s hear the text together and then think some more about this remarkable invitation from Jesus.

I. “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

A. Before Jesus issues this invitation to join him around the campfire, he invites the disciples to a little self-awareness exercise. This was, John tells us, the third appearance by Jesus to his disciples after he was risen. The first two took place in Jerusalem, in an upper room, where the disciples had been hiding and trying to make sense of it all. Jesus appeared, spoke a word of peace to them, helped them work through their doubts, and then summarized his program for their future: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you,” he told them.

B. At that point there were really no specific instructions that he gave them. What they did have was a message from the angel at the tomb, through the women who had arrived there early on Easter Sunday, that at some point Jesus would meet them all in Galilee. So, not sure what else to do, off they went. Galilee was home for most of them, and had been the base of their fishing operations before Jesus had called them, so it seemed like a natural decision. As well, it certainly seemed like a natural decision, once they arrived there, to get in their boats and go fishing. Jesus, evidently, hadn’t arrived yet and I can imagine that family members were urging them to do something sensible for a change, including, maybe, earning a living! Not surprisingly, Peter led the way and the rest said, “Good idea Pete; we’ll go with you.”

C. And so these seasoned fishermen went and did what they did best. They fished and they fished. They fished all night but they caught nothing. As the day began to dawn and they headed back to shore, in addition to being cold and hungry and tired, they must’ve been wondering whether they had lost their touch. What they certainly didn’t want to deal with was a smart-alek stranger standing at the campsite next to theirs, with coffee and bagel in hand, asking them about their catch, or lack thereof. In fact, he seemed to know that their boat was empty. “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” he asked them.

How would you have heard that question? Do you know, this is often the way of God. Not to get us thinking of ourselves as failures, but asking questions that help us reflect on, and to face, what has

happened in our lives, particularly at those times when we have gone off without him. The most famous of those questions is probably “Adam, where are you?” (Ge. 3:9). God knew full well where Adam was. He and Eve had gone off to do their own thing, it had ended badly, and God wanted them to acknowledge that in order for them to move forward. Here, it seems as if Jesus wanted the disciples to face this question: “How has your self-reliance worked out for you, even in the area of your expertise?” To their credit, the disciples answered honestly – “Not very well.”

II. “Throw your net on the right side....”

A. Then, when they listened to his instructions, throwing their net on the other side of their boat, they caught so many fish they couldn’t even haul the net in. Interestingly someone in that boat actually counted the number of fish they had caught – 153. It’s kind of an odd number. Its significance probably lies in the abundance that Jesus enabled, kind of like the 150 gallons of wine Jesus had produced out of water at that wedding in the nearby Galilean town of Cana. Abundance, it seems, bookends John’s gospel.

B. Whether they were thinking of that moment or not, I’m pretty sure they had to be thinking of the moment when Jesus, in calling Peter to become a disciple, had enabled Peter to haul in a large catch after he had caught nothing all night (Lk. 5:1-11). Their memories became clear enough that they began to recognize the stranger on the shore and scrambled to make their way to him. Peter even jumped out of the boat in an effort to get to shore faster, and this AFTER putting his jacket on, something no boating safety course would recommend, which shows you how excited Peter was to be in the presence again of his loving Lord.

III. “Come . . .”

A. One does wonder what went through Peter’s mind when he noticed the charcoal fire that Jesus had going. The last charcoal fire Peter had stood around was in the courtyard of the high priest where Peter had denied ever knowing Jesus, three times. But Jesus had no unkind words for Peter, no “I told you so’s.” Instead, it seems as if Jesus just wants to be with them. “Come,” he says, “and have breakfast.” In that sense, the four-letter word “come” merges with another, the word “with.” Before telling them what to do, before returning to the metaphor he’s used with his disciples that he was training them to fish for people, Jesus just wants them to be, to be with him, to sit around the campfire and enjoy his presence as he enjoys theirs.

When is the last time you simply enjoyed the presence of Jesus? Have you ever had a “Come and have breakfast moment” with Jesus?

B. I had one a few weeks ago. It came through what I’ve come to consider one of the least favorite questions I find myself getting asked as I inform people about my retirement. It’s this: “So what are you going to do in your retirement?” If I answer, “Well, I’m not totally sure,” I feel like people aren’t really happy with that, figuring I’m going to be wasting my time, or get bored, or shouldn’t have retired in the first place. Well, when we were up providing Rama’s mother with some assistance, Rama went up to her mom’s apartment and I stayed outside, enjoying a rare sunny day on a bench with my coffee. After a few minutes, some church bells began to chime. I looked up and off in the distance, framed by two large groups of trees, was a beautiful steeple. The music went on for about five minutes, playing a hymn I had never heard, but it didn’t matter; it just filled my heart.

And I found myself saying, “Jesus, while I’m not altogether sure what my days of retirement will be like, let’s make sure we have breakfast, a lot.”

C. Of course, you don’t need to be retired to enjoy such moments. Where do you need that invitation? Where do you need Jesus to simply invite you to come to him and to be with him, spending and enjoying time together so that he can nourish and feed you? Let’s come to the table where Jesus holds out a remarkable invitation for us to come and be with him by actually taking him in...