

“Grace for Breakfast”

Introduction: At the beginning of the book called “Acts,” in which Luke chronicles the arrival of the Spirit and the launching of the mission of the church, we read in the opening verses that after he was risen, Jesus spent 40 days revealing himself to his followers, giving them, as Luke puts it, “many convincing proofs that he was alive” (1:3). During that time, Luke tells us, he also taught them more about the kingdom of God – probably an “advanced seminar,” having to do with how his death and resurrection factored in to the new creation God was bringing about, and how the longing and aspirations of the human heart are fulfilled in him. Jesus wrapped it all up by telling his followers that they would have a key role to play in all this by bearing witness in word and in deed to all that they had seen and heard. However, they were not to charge out and begin filling this role; they were to wait until the Holy Spirit had come to fill them.

While we can sometimes be hesitant to bear witness to Jesus, I don’t sense any such hesitancy here. Given how certain these folks were that Jesus had come back from the dead, and the place that such resurrection played in God’s scheme of things—in the new life that God was making available—I imagine that they were chomping at the bit to get going and share this good news with others. But, to their credit, they didn’t rush out; they waited, spending intentional and regular time together in prayer until the divine guidance and power of the Spirit came upon them.

Well might we wonder: How were they able to wait? Our text for today is helpful here. In it, at what John tells us is the third post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his followers, in which we see Jesus, using fishing as his subject, provides an object lesson on what can happen if we try to accomplish the mission of God under our own steam and with our own smarts, vs. what it looks like if we’re following his direction and seeking his sustenance. [READ]

Let’s work our way through this episode using the four statements we hear Jesus make to guide us.

I. “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

A. The scene has a kind of eerie quality about it. Imagine a misty, foggy, dewy early morning at the seaside. The seaside in question in this case is the Sea of Galilee. A handful of Jesus’ disciples have gathered there, in part because the region of Galilee was where Jesus said, as communicated by the angel at his tomb, that he’d meet them. But I think they’d also gathered there because they’d begun to feel a bit purposeless, after Jesus’ initial appearances to them, and figured they’d best be getting back to fishing. It’s what they knew best, and it was high time for them, family members must have thought, to do something sensible again, even to get back to earning a living! Life goes on. You gotta eat and feed your family. And it certainly didn’t seem like Jesus was around anywhere waiting for them so Peter, as was often the case, led the way, declaring it was time to get back to normal: “I’m going fishing.” “Good idea, Pete; we’ll go with you.”

B. And so these seasoned veterans went out to fish. They fished all night. They fished in waters they knew well. They fished and they fished and they caught nothing. As the day began to dawn, they made their way back to shore, no doubt tired and sore and hungry. What they certainly didn’t want to deal with was a smart-alek stranger standing on the shore, coffee and donut in hand, asking them about their catch. In fact, he seemed to know that their boat was empty. “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

C. 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 to reflect on, and to face, what has happened in our lives at those times where we have gone off without him. “Adam, where are you?” is perhaps the most famous of God’s questions (Ge. 3:9). God knew full well where Adam was hiding physically but wanted Adam to face where he had gone spiritually, to think about how it was going, this thing Adam, with the help of Eve, had decided to do all on their own. The underlying question for these disciples in the boat seemed to be, “How has your self-reliance worked out for you, even in your area of expertise?” To their credit, the disciples answered this man honestly: “Not very well.”

II. “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”

A. Gratefully, when God brings us to face our emptiness, he doesn’t rub it in but directs us to satisfy our longings and aspirations in him. So he directs these fellows to try again but this time to throw their nets on the other side of their boat. There, they found so many fish that they had trouble pulling the net in. The count we read later, 153, is a bit puzzling but probably just to indicate the abundance that Jesus enabled, like the abundance of wine he produced out of water, 150 gallons, recorded by John at the beginning of his gospel (2:1-11). When you think about it that way, the abundance Jesus enables frames the entire gospel.

B. It also, I’d imagine, took them back to the time when Jesus first called them to follow him. Peter had, again, been out all night fishing and had caught nothing. But Jesus then instructed him to go back out and let his nets down, and he caught so much that it almost sunk two boats as he and his companions endeavored to pull their nets in. Jesus used that episode to let them know that he was now going to teach them to fish for people (Luke 5:1-11). It had to have jogged their memory as the mist began to clear, both on the Sea and in their minds! And then it became clear to them that the stranger on the shore was Jesus. Jesus had come to direct them in the mission to which he was calling them.

C. “Apart from me,” Jesus sought to impress upon them a bit earlier, “you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). These fishermen were given a vivid picture of that truth, on more than one occasion. I’m actually glad for that. It means it’s ok to need repeat lessons, which we all do! Where might you need to hear that truth spoken? Where, as a church, might we need to hear it? How do we need to hear Jesus guide us and direct us as we seek to share the good news with the next generation? As we heard Jesus say in that room with the disciples: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (20:21). Who could have envisioned the unique way in which the Father sent the Son into the world?! Can we be in a posture of prayerful listening as we seek to discern the unique ways the Son might be sending us, even into our neighborhoods?

III. “Bring some of the fish you have just caught. . . Come and have breakfast.”

A. After his disciples reach shore, they see, and probably smell, a charcoal fire that Jesus has begun with several fish already being grilled, along with some bread. Jesus then instructs them to bring some of their catch. I think it speaks to the missional partnership Jesus calls us to as well as the fact that our call is not just for us to gather people (fish) together, but to bring them to Jesus.

B. As we join him in what he’s doing, Jesus not only directs us, he sustains and nourishes us by his grace, before we have done a thing: “Come and have breakfast.” If we are to carry on his mission, we will need to allow him to feed us. And he has only heart-healthy food in store for us. As he once said,

“Man doesn’t live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Ma. 4:4). His heart-healthy word feeds us with reminders and descriptions of his great love for us. His heart-healthy word fills us with his harmonious and beautiful purposes for his creation. His heart-healthy word nourishes us with his will for his people and his desire for his church.

C. A few years ago I came across an article in *The Washington Post* about humanist gatherings, congregations that don’t believe in God, led by pastors who don’t believe in God. So why do they gather? They gather because they have a need to live with a purpose. In particular, they have a yearning for justice, community, and hope. Jesus, as he stands cooking by that charcoal fire, would share those yearnings, and offer that he’s able to satisfy those yearnings as nothing else can, as we pursue God’s purposes for the world, and participate in God’s vision for humanity. There we find that justice is at the heart of God’s character, that community is the nature of the trinity – the triune God in whose image we have been created – and that hope is born and grounded in his resurrection.

What do you hunger for? What do people you know hunger for? Where do you need to hear Jesus whisper, “Come and have breakfast”?

Let me return us to our prayer of approach as we conclude:

Fill us, heavenly Father, with your life and health and peace.

Feed us with your word and direct us in the pursuit of your purposes.

Show us how we might participate in your vision for humanity, that all our longings and aspirations would be satisfied. Amen.