

# NEW MEALS: BROKEN AND BLESSED

*The Rev. Geoff Parker to Foreside Community Church - Falmouth, ME*

Sunday, May 05, 2019

Scripture: [John 21:1–19](#)

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SCRIPTURE

So here we are in the season of Easter... here we are among the disciples wondering at what the risen Jesus is up to, and what resurrection will mean for us, whatever it has meant for Jesus. Today, our scripture comes from the Gospel of John, in what many feel is an addendum to the text, possibly added later as a charge to the disciples... who have largely been passive, wondering at, but perhaps a little paralyzed with awe at the resurrection of Jesus.

So we meet the disciples at work, fishing, which should sound familiar. Then they will meet Jesus, who is a little unfamiliar to them this day. And then, very quietly, their lives will change again, eating breakfast by the shore.

## SERMON

It is not for me, but I know of people who would gladly admit that fishing is their happy place. It's when they are far removed from the world, and where they find comfort.

With Jesus risen, and appearing, but not always being clear—or at least understood—something that had not changed from his teaching ministry with them, the disciples kind of reboot. Have you ever had something huge happen in your life, so that the only possible response is to kind of go back to the start and retrace your steps? Maybe see if you can't make some improvements the next time around?

Because these followers and lovers of Jesus have thrown themselves right back into... fishing. Exactly where Jesus found them. I think they have kind of run home to their comfort zone.

I swear this is how the entire high school and college reunion business continues to exist. It's not because high school and college were awesome. Seriously, I didn't know you then, but I was you then... it was not awesome, it was awkward and weird, and heartbreaking, and hard... seems like the likely reason we want to go back is to love our friends who went through it with us, and perhaps to forget how utterly uncertain *this actual* moment in our lives is... visiting a time when even if we did not know what was coming, we now know we survived it.

The thing is, you can't go back. Our lives and time only work one way.

So Jesus appears to the disciples on the beach... even catching Peter in the highly unrecommended activity of naked fishing. If other appearances of Jesus risen have been about what resurrection means for Jesus, maybe for God... this scene will be about what resurrection means for *them*.

They are reminded that Jesus shows up in intimate meals. That Jesus feeds, fish and bread beyond imagining, just as he had done in life...

But then he does not leave them the same as he found them... No, loving, and losing him, and amazingly finding him again... they cannot be the same. Just as it is for all of us. Loving someone is just a recipe for having your heart broken one day or another... but it is also a recipe for having your heart opened, your heart changed. And so now, Jesus gives them the new mission.

The call to people of changed hearts, and thus new life, is to belong to one another and to care for one another... Each time Jesus asks of Peter's love, Peter wants to insist that the measure of which he loves Jesus is about Jesus... but it's not, as Jesus says over and over again: "Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep..." That's how you love Jesus. The measure of a changed heart will be in how we care for one another... and hold one another... and just a reminder, this is the same Jesus who says that there are lots of flocks, not just the ones they recognize... this ask, this command, is not small... it is larger than anyone on that beach could have imagined.

See, Peter, and we probably, wish that in the heartbreak of life we could go back to some comfortable past version of ourselves... before we risked too much in love, before we lost... but we can't. The tomb is empty, but it doesn't erase the cross.

The temptation is to use moments of pain or uncertainty is to try and go backwards, but perhaps even worse, to close ourselves off. The disciples spend an awful lot of time in Easter season behind doors, wondering if they can ignore the crucifixion, ignore death, now that Jesus is back. We all wonder if maybe Jesus's resurrection means that *we* don't have to change. So we all can relate, if Peter wasn't so sure about loving and feeding all these "lambs" as much as he wanted to love Jesus.

The early church that the disciples would found would look towards Jesus, but in a hurtful division and fight with their Jewish family, friends, and community, they would come to deny that part of their own history and life. They would wall off certain sheep.

One of the painful parts of that denial is a lasting thread of anti-semitism in Christian thought, theology, and tradition through the centuries. The attack last weekend on the Chabad Synagogue in San Diego shows that painful thread is still deeply woven into Christian teaching and life in far too many places.

*We believe that helping any human being tap into their divine spark is a step toward fixing this broken world and bringing closer the redemption of humanity.* <sup>[1]</sup> - Rab. Yisroel Goldstein

The Christian author and speaker, Rachel Held Evans, died yesterday morning at the age of only 37. Her husband Dan, and their two children should be close in prayer. She had come from a conservative evangelical background to become a leading voice for the ministry of women, and the call to a more compassionate, and more broad Christianity. She made lots of wonderful friends, supported the work and ministry of others, broadened the spectrum of whose voices were heard, whose faces were represented.

*When I roll my eyes and fold my arms and say, “Well, I know God can’t be present over there,” I am numbing myself with cynicism. And I am missing out. I am missing out on a God who surprises us by showing up where we don’t think God belongs. I am missing out on a God whose grace I need just as desperately.*

*The annoying thing about being human is that to be fully engaged with the world, we must be vulnerable. And the annoying thing about being vulnerable is that sometimes it means we get hurt. And when your family includes the universal church, you’re going to get hurt. Probably more than once.* <sup>[2]</sup>

And in the words of another who found away across divisions:

*“If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of Him.” - James Baldwin*

Our instincts might be to shrink back in the face of uncertainty... but Jesus meets us even in the places of life where we go for comfort and escape and insists: feed those sheep. Our instincts might be to wall ourselves off, and care only for those we feel most attracted to or connect with, but Jesus insists: love, feed. Our instincts have far too often in history been to put guardrails and fences around this communion table, but Jesus has said welcome, love, feed. Our instincts might be to claim Jesus’s resurrection as the only transformation we need, but we all need resurrection and Jesus insists, be changed, welcome, love, feed. Be changed even when you are drowning in uncertainty, welcome even when you are uncomfortable, love even when it hurts, feed even when you don’t want to or just wish Jesus took you at your word. Do it all anyway. **That’s the call.**

May we live it in our lives, may we live it in this community, may we live it with God’s help and God’s grace. Amen.

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1. [A Terrorist Tried to Kill Me Because I Am a Jew. I Will Never Back Down.](#) by Yisroel Goldstein | [The New York Times](#) ↩
  2. Evans, Rachel Held. *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church* (pp. 222–223). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition. ↩