

**Sunday 1 May 2022 - Easter 3**

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## **Implications of the Resurrection**

### **John 21:1-19**

There is something mystical about today's story. The images of fishing, dawn, mysterious presence, intuitive recognition, breakfast over a campfire, and the challenge to love, feed and follow make this story compelling to the soul. This 21st chapter is a kind of appendix or second edition ending. The Gospel of John originally ended at the close of chapter 20. But a few years later, the community that created this Gospel decided to write one more chapter. Why? I think this chapter may have been added for at least two reasons.

First, the author was aware that there were alternative traditions of the risen Jesus meeting his disciples in Galilee (as Mark and Matthew claim), and so this allowed the author to tell another story of the risen Jesus. Second, the author must have felt that the story of Peter had not been completed – there had to be forgiveness for Peter denying Jesus three times.

"The world is a circle without a beginning, and nobody knows where it really ends." Those are the opening lines of a song by Liv Ullman in the film *Lost Horizon*. That song seems like a perfect metaphor for today's Gospel; Jesus' third and final visit to his friends where everything started, near the Sea of Tiberias.

It seems like a strange sort of *deja vu* experience—a strange flashback. Shouldn't they be doing something different with their lives after spending three years with Jesus? Perhaps-but perhaps not!

We don't know what was going through the minds of those disciples. They have seen Jesus, they know he is not dead, but instead of taking on his teaching and preaching, it sounds as if they have returned to what they knew best, what was most comfortable for them. Perhaps they were still struggling with all that had happened to them, with the amazing events and ideas that had impacted their lives. Maybe they needed to gather once more in a familiar place and work out some of their thoughts and questions by doing something they knew by heart: fishing.

So today, for the second time, we have failed fishing; the presence of Jesus; a miracle and torn nets; and finally, the re-calling of Peter. In the Gospel today, Peter and the apostles hear a voice. It is the resurrected Christ. This voice isn't flashy or loud. The voice they hear tells them not to give up on catching fish. The voice they hear tells them, "Come and have breakfast." What a scene: the risen Lord, the King of the Universe, the Alpha and the Omega, sitting on the sea's shore making breakfast.

Amid the miracles is simplicity. In the midst of miracles is everyday life. This is where Christ meets us. He meets us in the movements of our life. We need to eat; we need to work. And the risen Christ is there among us. God chose to come among us, and even after the miracle of the Resurrection, God decided to make us breakfast.

The breakfast is the church's Eucharist. Whenever the church gathers for worship, we have breakfast with Jesus. Jesus is not only within the meal itself but is also a spiritual presence with us, providing and sharing the food.

This is Incarnation: God appearing where we would never expect it. Jesus is part of everything we do. Our life is a miracle, and our life is a prayer. Sometimes we miss this in our busyness and weariness. Jesus' disciples also missed it. The disciples returned to their seashore and their boats. But Jesus followed them there. He stretched out his hands once more and asked again: do you love me?

The English language has poverty of words for love. We have to modify love with other words if we want to try and be precise about what we're talking about. Greek does a better job of this, as we can see in the conversation that Jesus has with Peter after they finish breakfast. Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" And Peter answers him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." But Jesus doesn't seem satisfied with this answer, so he asks Peter again, and Peter again gives the same answer. This exchange happens three times.

Why would Jesus ask Peter this question three times? In the original Greek, Jesus and Peter use entirely different words for love. What Jesus asks Peter is: do you *agape* me? And Peter answers: yes Lord, you know that I *philia* you.

*Agape* and *philia*. Jesus wants *agape*: the kind of love that is life-transforming, wholly consuming, that means commitment beyond feelings. *Agape* is the self-giving love that sacrifices its own needs for the good of others. This is the kind of love that God has for us. This is the love Jesus showed us on the cross, and Jesus is asking for this kind of love in return. But all Peter can offer is *philia*: I have affection for you, Lord. I like you, well enough. That's what *philia* is — "friendship."

We shouldn't be too hard on Peter. Perhaps he was just trying to be honest about the kind of love he was capable of giving Jesus in return.

A remarkable and beautiful thing happens at the end of this exchange: the first two times Jesus asks the question, he says, "Do you *agape* me?" And Peter answers, "Lord, I *philia* you." But when the third time Jesus asks, he changes the question and uses *philia* instead of *agape*, the same word for love that Peter had been using all along.

Peter is hurt, perhaps because he feels embarrassed by Jesus' expectations. But in reality, he does not need embarrassment: the point is that Jesus loves us enough to meet us where we are. If all we can offer is *philia*, then Jesus will meet us there and keep walking with us. As we walk with Jesus and our hearts grow more open, God's *agape* will come in. And we know it happened in the life of Peter.

Most importantly, we should never forget: we are forgiven. We are invited to start over. We are completely loved. And we have a job to do. This isn't only Peter's story; it's our story, too. When fear holds us back, love calls us forward. When we feel trapped by the way things have always been, Jesus invites us to cast our nets on the other side of the boat — change our perspective in light of the Resurrection. The light of Resurrection, shining into us, invites us to look clearly at how we have made choices out of fear rather than love and move away from the fears that bind us.

Jesus invites us: Come and have breakfast. In the morning light of Resurrection, there is no room for guilt and fear. We are forgiven, we are loved, and we are free, and we have some job to do. Amen.