

Breakfast by the Sea

JOHN 21:1-14

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*****COVID-19 LIVESTREAM*****

It is good to be with you this morning! I hope all of you are doing well and that you are able to sing, and pray, and to partake of the Lord's Supper on your own or with your families. We've put several recipes for unleavened bread out there. We've also provided a number of ways to participate in the weekly collection (either by mail or online). But we do miss being together, and so I would love to hear from you. We've put the church's contact information on the screen, so if there is any way we can help, if there is something we need to be praying about, we hope you will get in touch.

As we've done over the past few weeks, we've once again put a summary of God's plan of salvation on the screen. The bad news is: All of us have sinned. But the good news is that God has made forgiveness possible. We must hear the gospel, we must believe it, we must turn away from sin, we must publicly confess our belief in Jesus as the Son of God, and we must allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins. At this point, we are born into God's family, and the Christian life begins. Once we've obeyed the gospel, if we then we turn away from it for some reason, we need to repent and pray, confessing our sins to God and asking him for forgiveness. If we can help with any of this in any way, if you have any questions at all, if you would just like to talk about it, we invite you to give us a call or send a message.

If I were to ask you what the Smokehouse, the Old Timer's, the Country Boy, and Uncle Herschel's have in common, I'm guessing that at least a few of you might recognize these as being various breakfasts that are served at Cracker Barrel. Most of you know that I love breakfast. In fact, I would agree with most nutritionists that breakfast is perhaps the most important meal of the day. I might disagree with most nutritionists, however, as to what that first meal of the day should probably contain! It is hard to beat a breakfast from Cracker Barrel or the breakfast special from Mickies Dairy Bar across from Camp Randall – the bacon, the yanks, the wheat toast, and the eggs. I can't believe I eat at Mickies, but when I do, it's at the end of a 6-mile bike ride – I ride, and then eat, and then ride back home – it is a wonderful experience! I love the Dutch Baby at the Original Pancake House. I love the biscuits and gravy at the Log Cabin up in Baraboo. If you have not been to the Log Cabin in Baraboo, it is worth the drive! It was Don Schmudlach who first told me about the biscuits and gravy at the Log Cabin, and I am so thankful for that good advice. We've eaten there several times after camping at Devil's Lake State Park. We have driven up there just for breakfast sometimes. It is worth the 45 miles!

And then, of course, there is the Big Breakfast down at Cottage Café, right behind the fire station off of Cottage Grove Road, near our church facility. I've been eating there every Sunday morning for probably close to 15 years. Several years ago, Scott Busse told me I had to try the walleye and eggs, and at first I thought, "That's disgusting!" I didn't want to disrupt my normal Sunday morning routine, so one morning I was over there on a weekday to do some snowblowing, and I wrapped it up right around 6 a.m. as the Cottage Café was opening, so I gave it a shot. Wow! Walleye and eggs is amazing! I still can't convince my wife of this. She says that fish is not a breakfast food. Someday. Someday I hope to win her over.

Breakfast is certainly the most important meal of the day. But perhaps the only thing that might make any breakfast better would be to eat it outside, to cook it over a campfire – to survive a night of camping, to wake up and get the fire started, to smell the smoke and the coffee, the whole experience just seems to make a good breakfast even better.

This morning, I want us to think about a breakfast that was cooked by the Lord himself over a charcoal fire on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The passage is found in John 21. I won't be putting the text itself on the screen today, so I really hope you can open up an actual Bible, either on a phone or another device, or an actual old-fashioned hard copy printed on actual paper. As we make our way there, I want to point out that John 21 is rather unusual, because when we get to the end of John 20, it almost seems as if John is bringing everything to a close. The last two verses of John 20 would have been a great ending. We have the incident with Thomas wanting to see some proof, and then we come to John 20:30-31, where the text says, ***"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."*** That right there would have made a great ending to the book of John.

But wait, there's more! And so the inspired writer continues with John 21 as several of the apostles decide to go fishing together. And it seems as if John includes this to tie up some loose ends. You might remember that on the night before he died, Jesus tells the disciples that after he is raised from the dead, he would go ahead of them to Galilee. In fact, this is the message he gives to Mary Magdalene in Matthew 28, ***"Tell them to meet me in Galilee"*** [paraphrased]. And so, many years later, as John writes, he seems to remember, and he seems to think to himself, "We need to finish this. We need to explain what happens in Galilee." And so he continues with John 21 as something of a "bonus." Let's look together this morning at John 21:1-14,

¹ After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way ² Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. ⁴ But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." ⁶ And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. ⁷ Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish.

⁹ So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.” ¹¹ Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples ventured to question Him, “Who are You?” knowing that it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. ¹⁴ This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

Up at the beginning, we have Peter suggesting that he’s going fishing. I was surprised to find that a good number of people see this as disobedience, that Peter is abandoning Jesus and going back to his old way of life. I don’t know about you, but I don’t see it that way. He’s been told to head up to Galilee and to wait for the Lord. They are in Galilee, and they are waiting to meet the Lord. Peter and the others are doing what they have been told to do. But as they wait, they need to eat. Perhaps they need to make a living. They perhaps need to provide for their families. Or maybe it’s just a matter of needing to do something. I don’t know about you, but I have a hard time sitting around doing nothing. Even if I’m waiting, I need to be doing something. Peter, then, decides to go fishing, and it seems that at least six others go along as well. And I don’t know how important this is, but I want us to notice that Peter and Thomas are listed first. Peter is the one who denied the Lord, and Thomas is the one who demanded evidence. We also have Nathanael, we have the sons of Zebedee (that’s James and John), and then we also have two others who are not named, for a total of seven out of the eleven.

And I also want us to notice, here at the beginning, what the main point is. Twice in this paragraph, John tells us why he’s writing – once at the beginning, and once at the end (in verse 1 and in verse 14) – John tells us what’s going on here: Jesus is manifesting himself to his disciples. And in verse 14, we find that this is the **“third time”** this happens. To **“manifest”** is to “make visible,” to “make clear,” to “reveal.” He appears to the apostles for the first time on the Sunday evening of the day of his resurrection. He then appears a second time a week later, on the following Sunday evening, only this time Thomas is present. For some reason, Thomas had missed the first one. So, the second time is when Thomas is invited to examine the evidence. This is now the third time Jesus is making himself visible to the apostles as a group.

I would also point out here at the beginning that the Lord seems to be able to disguise himself in some way. Something about his resurrected body is different. He passes through locked doors. He is not recognized until he wants to be recognized. We think about Jesus appearing to Mary in the garden near the tomb. She at first thought he was the gardener, until he called her by name. We think of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus who had an extended conversation with the Lord as they walked along the way. It was only when they broke bread together that they recognized the Lord for who he truly was.

What John is telling us about here is the third time that Jesus makes himself visible to the apostles themselves. At least two weeks have gone by since the resurrection, and the apostles have now traveled to Galilee, a distance of roughly 80 miles to the north (several days on foot). But again, the emphasis here is on Jesus making himself visible to the apostles. As we study this passage, I want to point out two ways that he does this. So, in our study, let’s notice the two ways Jesus reveals himself to his apostles.

I. **And we start in the first half of this passage (primarily in verses 1-8) as JESUS REVEALS HIMSELF THROUGH THIS MIRACULOUS CATCH OF FISH.**

In verse 3, the Bible says that the disciples, ***“...went out and got in the boat; and that night they caught nothing.”*** Now, please remember: Several of these men had been commercial fishermen. As we sometimes point out: These are like those men on the show *Deadliest Catch*. These men do this for a living. They know the techniques. They have the equipment. They know where to go in this particular lake. But this night they catch nothing. You might have noticed that I have a net up behind me. This net belonged to my great-grandfather, Askew McCormac, as he was a commercial fisherman on the Cumberland River near Clarksville, Tennessee. As I understand it, this is a net that he made. Unfortunately, fishing is not a skill that I inherited. But most of us have at least some idea concerning what is happening here. Somehow they would cast the net, perhaps they would let it sink, perhaps they would drag it alongside the boat for a bit, and then they would haul it back up. And we find here that the apostles did this all night long.

As the sun comes up, they see a figure on the beach, and this figure calls out and says, ***“Children, you do not have any fish, do you?”*** At first, I thought it was a bit weird that he calls them ***“children,”*** but I started looking into it, and it seems this was a term that was sometimes used generically. I might compare it to the way we use the word “guys.” We might not be referring to actual “guys,” but it’s the way we talk, and so it might be something like, ***“Hey guys, you don’t have any fish, do you?”*** I also want us to notice how he words this. The NASB handles it well. He’s not asking, “Do you have any fish?” but it’s more of a statement, ***“You don’t have any fish,”*** with the ***“do you?”*** thrown on at the end. It’s a bit negative, ***“I see you don’t have any fish,”*** but I’m wording in the form of a question because it sounds a bit nicer! And this would be common to have perhaps somebody from a local market coming down and asking about the catch. People would hang out on the shore, waiting for the boats to come in, so they could get the fish to come take them to the market. I would also point out that he actually doesn’t even use the normal word for “fish.” Instead, he uses a word referring to something that you might put between two pieces of bread! And so, this figure on the shore is really asking, ***“Hey guys, you don’t even have enough to put between two pieces of bread, do you?”*** I don’t think it was intended this way, but it’s actually a pretty good insult for a fisherman! You fish all night, and your buddy calls out, ***“You don’t even have enough to put on a sandwich, do you?”*** But the point of the first three verses is: They fish all night, and they catch absolutely nothing, not even enough for a sandwich. What in the world is going on? This has never happened before...

...and yet it has happened before! In fact, a situation almost exactly like this is how it all started. Several years earlier (recorded for us back in Luke 5), some of these same men had just had a terrible night just like this one. Here it is from Luke 5,

¹ Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; ² and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. ³ And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat. ⁴ When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon answered and said, “Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets.” ⁶ When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; ⁷ so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began

to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men." ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

Now, here we are 3-½ years later, they are back in the same spot, they catch absolutely nothing AGAIN, and there is this figure of a man on the shore calling out and asking them about it. They answer, **"No,"** they have caught nothing. This figure then tells them to cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat. And I almost laugh as I read that sometimes. As if these professional fishermen hadn't tried that yet! They've been fishing all night long, the boat has been all over the place at all different angles – this makes no sense. Certainly, Jesus could have caused these fish to jump into the boat, he could have commanded the fish to move around to the left side of the boat, but it seems he might be doing this as something of a test of obedience. This is perhaps a "Naaman dipping seven times in the Jordan" moment. This is a "marching around Jericho once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day" moment. This is a "leading 300 men to defeat an enormous enemy using nothing but torches, clay pots, and trumpets" moment. And they pass the test They cast the net on the right side, and they are unable to haul it in because of the great number of fish.

What I want us to notice now is that John, the one we assume to be the author of this account, says to Peter, **"It is the Lord."** John is the first to put these two events together, **"It is the Lord!"** It's not that John could see more clearly than anybody else through the fog, but he realizes that this has happened before, **"It is the Lord!"** But, before John himself can do anything about it, Peter jumps overboard and starts swimming for the shore. John is the first to understand, but Peter is the first to act.

A bit later (in verse 11), we find that Peter is the one who finally gets back to pulling this net up on the shore, and the Bible says that the net was full of **"large fish."** The word we translate as "large" is the Greek word "mega." These are **"mega-fish"!** These are not any old fish, these are **"mega-fish."** They are huge, and the net is full, almost to the point of breaking.

John then adds that they count and come up with a total of 153 fish. I will warn you: If you study this passage on your own, you will find some absolutely insane theories about the significance of the number 153. After we are done here, I would encourage you to just go to the Wikipedia page for the number 153, and start by noticing the significance of this number. Notice everything in the world with the number 153 in it. But then also notice how Wikipedia has a sub-heading for the number 153 in the Bible. In my file folder on John 21, I have a 16-page pamphlet written by a man who thinks he's figured this out. He tries to explain the symbolism of the number 153. I've read it a few times, and I still don't get it. There are all kinds of strange theories out there. 153 is supposedly a "triangular number." 153 is supposedly the number of times the name of God is found in Genesis. 153 is supposedly the number of species of fish in the Sea of Galilee at this time (so, they caught one of each). The theories on this are eternal.

But I would suggest another possibility: John uses the number 153, because they caught 153 fish! It would be like any other situation today where fishermen think they might have a record on their hands: They count, they measure, they document, and then they tell people about it! Today, the picture of this overloaded net would be on Instagram. By the way, Reid, that was a nice-looking fish you had yesterday! When good things happen, we tell people about it. And that seems to be what John is doing here. As an old man now, as he looks back 50

or 60 years into the past, he remembers, “Ah, 153 fish! That was definitely the Lord! Jesus did that for us!” First of all, then, Jesus reveals himself through this miraculous catch of fish. The apostles see what happens here, and they conclude that this is Jesus.

II. As we move into the second half of this passage, we find that JESUS NOW ALSO REVEALS HIMSELF IN A SHARED MEAL.

Starting in verse 9, we have the charcoal fire and the fish already placed on it. With everything the Lord has gone through over the past three weeks, here he is, once again, preparing and serving a meal with nail-scarred hands. He is servant and host, all rolled into one, just as he was for the Last Supper, just a few weeks earlier. He invites the apostles to participate. He doesn't do for them what they can do for themselves, he allows them to be a part of it. But he reveals himself as the servant he has always been. This is the same Lord who washed their feet on the night before his crucifixion. He's been through his own death, burial, and resurrection, he has crushed Satan's head under his feet, he has accomplished everything his Father sent him to accomplish, but instead of wearing a golden crown and riding in on a white horse (or whatever), we see the Lord crouched over a charcoal fire on a beach, cooking fish. And now he gives the invitation (in verse 12), ***“Come and have breakfast.”*** At this moment, once again, they know that this is the Lord. He then takes the bread and gives it to them, and the fish in the same way. He cares for these men, and here they are hungry and dripping wet. Jesus is concerned, and he provides for them. He is providing their daily bread. And by serving in this way, he's continuing to teach. He's setting the example. He's revealing what is truly important – feeding the hungry, providing warmth, rebuilding relationships. He's revealing that he is the same Jesus they have always known. In fact, several years later, Peter will look back on this meal in particular as he explains the gospel to Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, in Acts 10. He says,

³⁸ You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. ³⁹ We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. ⁴⁰ God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, ⁴¹ not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

We ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead! This meal revealed to Peter that Jesus truly did come back from the dead. And when he did, the disciples went out doing good, just as he did – teaching, and preaching, and healing, and feeding, and serving – and his disciples have continued, even up through history until today, breaking bread in his name. And the invitation Jesus gives to the disciples (in verse 12) is an invitation he continues to make today, repeated in Revelation 3:20, ***“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”*** Even if we've failed, like Peter, the Lord makes the first move and gives the invitation.

Conclusion:

So, in summary, Jesus reveals himself to the apostles in the miraculous catch and also in the shared meal. The question is: What does this mean for us? What it means is: Jesus reveals himself to us, through the written word. Remember, again, the two verses that come right before this, right at the end of John 20, ***“Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these***

have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” John’s goal in writing this has been to make us believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. His goal in writing is to give us life in His name.

Today, we’ve been looking at an eyewitness account from a man who knew Jesus as a friend. And as an eyewitness, John would encourage us, I believe, to turn our ear toward the shore and to listen for the voice of Jesus. He speaks from his inspired word, and He calls us through the gospel, the good news, this book that we’ve been reading. We weren’t there for that breakfast by the sea, but we benefit from it.

He does not demand that we be good fishermen, but he does demand that we trust and obey. He demands that we cast the net on the right side. He demands that we turn away from sin. He demands that we confess him publicly as being the Son of God. He demands that we be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. And again, if we can help you with this in some way, we would invite you to get in touch.

As we close, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the one and only almighty God, creator of heaven and earth, the master of ocean, and earth, and skies. We praise you this morning as our loving Father who knows what we need, even before we think to ask.

When we are scared, and frustrated, and alone, when the nets are empty, we ask for your help. We are thankful that you have revealed yourself to us in your word. We are thankful for this inspired document you have allowed us to study this morning.

We pray that we would recognize you with the wisdom and insight of John. We pray that we would run to you with the zeal and enthusiasm of Peter. We pray that we would obey you with the trust and faith of those apostles who cast the net on the other side.

We continue to pray for a resolution to the crisis we are facing. We don’t know the future, but we know you, and so we continue to ask for mercy and grace. We continue to ask a special blessing on all of those who are working so hard to bring this to an end – bless those who work in healthcare, bless those who serve you by keeping our communities safe, bless those in harm’s way and protect their families as well.

We continue to pray for our seniors. We ask a special blessing today on those who are struggling emotionally. We’ve been through so much the last few weeks, and some are having a hard time with it. We ask your blessings on them and on those who care for them.

We ask for opportunities to do good. We ask not only for the ability and resources, but we also ask for wisdom.

Bless our congregation. Although we are spread out, we come to you together at this moment as a Christian family, and we bring these requests to you, united in the name of your Son, Jesus. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com