

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

May 1, 2022 – EASTER 3, YR. C

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*Breakfast on the Beach—Jesus is the Feast!*”*

Acts 9:1-20	(Saul encounters the risen Christ and is converted)
Psalms 30	(Praise, prayer, and supplication before the Lord)
Revelation 5:11-14	(A vision of worship in heaven)
St. John 21:1-19	(The risen Jesus meets His disciples on the shore)

According to nutritionists, breakfast is the most important meal of the day. The word for this repast literally means “to break the fast of the prior night”—*break* fast. Adults who eat breakfast, along with lunch and dinner, tend to weigh less than those who skip their morning cornflakes and coffee. Also, experts claim breakfast eaters are less likely to have difficulties with concentration and metabolism.¹ So it’s clear that Jesus is onto something, when, in His third post-resurrection appearance, He prepares breakfast for His disciples on the beach.

However, Peter, James, John, Thomas, and Nathaniel aren’t there. They’ve all gone fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Fishing? Why weren’t they out spreading the news of the Risen Lord? Ah, but they have not yet received the Holy Spirit. It is He who will later equip these men with supernatural courage to preach the Gospel, and empower them to do the signs and wonders that confirmed the Good News.

Since they are not yet divinely-empowered apostles and evangelists catching people, these men fall back on what they know best: catching fish. But even that’s not going well—probably because God is eager for them to leave behind their former lives and get on with His work of ministry.

So, Jesus helps them out by directing the men to cast their empty nets in a different place. *Whoa!* The nets fill so fast, the guys can hardly pull them in. Yep, the fish are abundant, but this is no ordinary catch, for St. John records they netted 153 fish. Since this is such a specific number, one has to wonder what it means.

Well, it turns out, Greek zoologists of that era believed there were 153 different species of fish.² The disciples, therefore, have made the perfect catch: one of every kind. Hmm. In that phrase, can you hear an echo from Noah’s Ark?

That was when God wanted to preserve every kind of creature for the new world that He alone could make possible. And now that Christ is risen, the world truly has become a new Creation.

With this miraculous catch that points to new life in Christ, the disciples also may have been fulfilling a prophecy about God’s coming kingdom found in Ezekiel 47:10 (KJV): “It shall come to pass, that the fishers shall ... [have] a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many.”

Noted 17th-century Bible scholar, Matthew Henry, commented on this passage: “These waters signify the gospel of Christ, which went forth from Jerusalem, and spread into the countries about; also the gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost which accompanied it ... and produced blessed effects.”³

Previously, in Matthew 13:47, Jesus had said: “The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.” Indeed, God’s kingdom has come, for with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God’s work of redeeming the world is now complete. That is why, from the Cross, Jesus cried “It is finished!” Notice, He did not say, “I am finished”—as in, “I am dying.” No! Christ definitively pronounced that God’s plan of salvation which had been planned *even before* Creation was now fulfilled.

Part of what marks the coming of God’s kingdom is an abundance of all good things. In today’s case, it’s an awesome breakfast prepared by Jesus. Not until I re-read this lesson while preparing for today did I realize for the very first time that Jesus is there warming bread and cooking fish on a charcoal fire, even before the disciples bring any fish ashore. Now where did that bread and fish come from?!

This miraculous meal recalls how Jesus had earlier blessed enough loaves and fish to feed 5,000 hungry people (John 6:1-4). And, as Our Lord breaks the bread and gives it to His disciples, these gestures also suggest a Eucharistic celebration.⁴

Jesus says, “Come and have breakfast,” but almost immediately after the food is distributed, He starts questioning Peter’s love and loyalty, putting the disciple in a rather uncomfortable spot. I can relate: It’s become axiomatic that in my life when I get a phone call during breakfast, and the caller starts firing questions at me, it’s going to be “one of those days.” I guess Peter was having one, too.

Now, Jesus knows Peter’s heart better than *anyone*, so the loyalty questions aren’t for Jesus’ edification, they’re for Peter’s. Because he had denied Christ *three times*, now he needs to affirm his love and devotion *three times*. And what is Jesus’ response to Peter’s earlier betrayal? Love, mercy, and forgiveness, attributes He has in common with God the Father. But Simon doesn’t get away with simple absolution. He is not being reinstated to return to fishing. Rather, he is to become Peter—*petros*—the *rock*, on which Christ will found His Church that can never be destroyed. So Jesus instructs him: “Follow me. Feed my sheep.”

But what does that command mean for us? What might this commission mean in our lives today? Even if we are not leaders in the Church like Peter, feeding Christ’s sheep means the same for every follower of Jesus: Hospitality, generosity, and kind words. Turning the other cheek in humility, and dealing gently with one another. Caring for Creation, as well as those who are going through a rough patch.

Driving someone to the doctor; taking Communion to the homebound; visiting the sick and shut-ins; being patient with that person who’s going slow when you’re in a hurry. Giving to the poor, the needy, and the hungry. And, respecting the dignity and integrity of every human being. As it has been said, “Watch how you live, for *your* lives may be the only gospel anyone will ever read.”⁵

Here, in this breakfast on the beach, as at the Last Supper, Jesus is the host. But Jesus does not eat any of the food He offers to His disciples. In this, we see two things happening:

First, Christ models for His followers the command to feed others—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. With food, and with forgiveness. With bread, and with love. With meal-ing and healing.

Second, Jesus has no need to eat the food, because *He Himself* is the Feast. The miraculous bread and fish that Our Lord produces in order to feed His friends are signs of the One who truly nourishes our souls, equipping us to carry out His command to feed others.⁶

The meal will soon be gone. But Jesus will never leave or forsake them. He will remain with them in the power of the Holy Spirit filling their hearts and lives. He will be present in the love and care they show for one another. And He will commune with them in the bread and wine, each time they celebrate the Eucharist—just as He is for us.

At a church I served many years ago, one Sunday morning after Communion, a parishioner could not contain her excitement. Nearly jumping up and down, she gushed, “When I got up from the altar rail, I felt as though *I’d just had breakfast with Jesus!*” That’s because she did.

In that breakfast on the beach, Christ Himself was the Feast. It was His forgiveness, His love, and His acceptance that would inspire Peter to bravely minister in Christ’s name, and to accomplish great things for the Church. And Jesus continues to do the same for us today.

So, as you come forward to His Table this morning, hear Our Lord’s friendly invitation, “Come, have breakfast with Me.” Break the fast of sadness and despair. Break the fast of anxiety and fear. Break the fast of hopelessness and grief. Feast upon the Resurrection joy Christ offers you, and celebrate the coming of God’s kingdom among us. *Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

* Adapt. N. George-Hacker, 5 May 2019, St. John’s Episcopal Church, Compass, PA. Used with permission.

¹ “Breakfast,” [Wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breakfast), 23 April 2022 <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breakfast>> 23 April 2022.

² Adapt. Paul Cain (immanuelsheridan.blogspot.com) qtd. “Do You Love Me?” *Synthesis, Year C* (14 April 2013), p. 2.

³ “Ezekiel 47: Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary on the Bible,” Biblos.com © 2004-2011. <<http://mhc.biblecommenter.com/ezekiel/47.htm>> 12 April 2013.

⁴ Adapt. “Do You Love Me?” *Synthesis, Year C* (14 April 2013), p. 1.

⁵ Adapt. John W. Kilgore, qtd. “Do You Love Me?” *Synthesis, Year C* (14 April 2013), p. 3.

⁶ Adapt. H. K. Oehmig, “Do You Love Me?” *Synthesis, Year C* (14 April 2013), p. 4.