

BREAKFAST WITH JESUS

John 21: 1-14

[Augsburg University Chapel, 8 April 2021, Easter 1]

Biblical commentators suggest that the 21st chapter of John's gospel, from which we have read this morning, was added to the original narrative. And as is always the case in such findings, the question is why. What was it that those who edited the gospel felt needed to be added to complete the story? What was going on in the community of those for whom John's gospel account was meaningful that required 25 additional verses?

For some of us, these are intriguing questions of Biblical and theological scholarship; for others of us, not so much so. I might suggest, though, that for all of us – situated here some 1900 years after the gospel was circulated – these additional verses are most relevant. In fact, I might be so bold as to say that chapter 21 is meant especially for you and me here at Augsburg, in this chapel, during this Easter season, near the end of our academic year, in the midst of a global pandemic.

Let's imagine ourselves in the place of the disciples in these days after: after the intense years of ministry across the countryside, after the triumphal entry to Jerusalem, after the Passover, after poignant and emotional final meals together, after betrayal and denials, after the cross, after an empty tomb. Now what do we do?

Well, I guess you do what you know how to do. Simon Peter says it plainly, "I am going fishing." I'm going back to the life I knew before I was called away. I want what's normal. I'm going back to the familiar and mundane, as if these years with Jesus were simply a dream, ultimately a nightmare. I can go back and earn a living and get on with things, and the others join in. But there are no fish to find – the familiar and mundane is empty and disappointing.

And then there he is on the lakeshore. A vague figure, who knows of their disappointment and emptiness. "You have no fish, have you?" he asks. "No," they answer. "Cast your nets again and you will find some," and so their nets are filled beyond measure (153 fish, we're told a few verses later!) and they recognize him as Jesus their Lord.

And as they rush to greet him, filled once again with the joy and abundance they have known in their lives together, Jesus says simply "Come and have breakfast." There they are, gathered around the campfire, breaking bread together and eating the fish he helped them to catch. There they are, afraid to ask how this was possible, afraid to break the spell of the moment – and yet they knew it was the Lord! He is Risen, He is Risen Indeed.

I would guess that all of us have had moments when we have this sense of living in the days after ... My spouse, Abigail, has worked over the years in the arts community and she talks about how the preparation for an art exhibit or performance and production leads you through a series of emotions that can leave you pretty dejected when the production is over. Post-production blues, she calls them. Others of us might feel that way about the end of our college years here at Augsburg – what do I do now? Others among us may be retiring, wondering what will offer meaning and direction in the days ahead. Perhaps your examples are less extreme, though still unsettling. A relationship ends, a job search

falls apart, a family splits...what do we do in the days after? And all of us are left with our questions about what will we do after this pandemic is behind us?

Perhaps, like the disciples, it's back to what is familiar, to what we've always done. Or maybe it's coping with the disappointment and anxiety with a sense of fatalism – this is the best I can do and hope for. And perhaps, we too find our nets empty. The world defines success in ways we simply can't live up to.

And then he is there, standing on the lakeshore – just as when he first called to us, “follow me” – sending words of encouragement our way, instructing us to cast our nets again. And all of a sudden, we recognize our Lord and he invites us to come to the table, to break the bread together, to lay at the altar our burdens and joys, our disappointments as well as the bounty and abundance of our nets overflowing. He is risen; He is risen indeed.

Here is the powerful Easter message in these days after... the message we have from John's gospel that is so relevant to our 21st century lives of faith.

Yes, you must go back to your lives in the world. But now, your lives in the world have been transformed by the power of the resurrection. Now the calls you have received – your vocations – have a different meaning and trajectory. In your daily lives, God is alive and acting so that you might know and make real God's will for the world. What the world counts as success has been set aside for all time. Now your lives serve the Risen Lord.

No, I have not left you alone. I am here with you in your daily lives. I know you may be disappointed and dejected and anxious and afraid. Remember how I called to you from the lakeshore. Remember how you recognized me in the breaking of bread. Remember how I invited you into community. Know that I am with you, offering my comfort and encouragement and guidance and love – even when you feel lost and alone.

Yes, all has changed...so follow me again and still. We can't deny all that happened. Healing and compassion, love for our neighbors. Triumphant entries, frightening times of betrayal and denial. Feet washed and bread broken. Government and religious pageants aimed at dousing God's love. Horrific and painful death. Three days and a stone rolled away. Resurrection. Reports of being together again, despite the doubters. That now is done. God loves you. You have been redeemed. But that is not the end...

I need you now to follow again and still, to be my living body on earth, to share the good news. Come and have breakfast with me, for our work together has just begun.

One of the central claims of an Augsburg education, grounded in helping you find vocational meaning or hear your call, is how the various experiences of your life – growing up in a particular family, in a particular place; belonging to a particular religious community (or not); having a certain group of friends; coming to a particular college, where you study in a particular way a particular set of topics; choosing a particular career path, and so forth – how all of these experiences are part of a narrative that has history, that has an “arc” that has been influenced and shaped by the inter-dynamics of relationships and institutions and decisions that are all part of your vocational story. What I believe we do at Augsburg is not to tell you what your vocation should be (though sometimes we all do need advice!), but to help you make sense of your vocational story, to find the coherence in the narrative, to see the

significance of the various threads of your story as they weave a life for you in the world. To consider how you will live in the days after...because there will be many days after.

In this understanding of vocation, then, the Easter message about the days after becomes especially important because these are the days when we need to take responsibility for how our story continues to unfold, even when we are away from those advisors and teachers and friends who perhaps inspired us or motivated us or supported us down this path. As John's gospel concludes, God does not leave us alone in our vocational journeys in the mean time, Jesus is still inviting us to breakfast..

Wendell Berry, in his whimsical poem, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front", offers us an insightful take on this message for life in the days after:

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
[Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

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Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is highest in your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox

who makes more tracks necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

What to do now? Come and have breakfast. Practice resurrection. Thanks be to God. Amen.