

## **John 21:1-19 – The importance of Christian community**

Yesterday several of us were delighted to sit down here in church and enjoy a wonderful Eastertide lunch. Gathering for events such as this always makes me thankful that we have a space flexible enough to do this, and for the people that we can share the meal with. Throughout most of human history, sharing a meal together has been an important part of family and community life. When we share a meal, we share not just in the physical food that we eat, but also in fellowship. Communal meals nourish both the body and the soul. This morning, I invite you to picture a simple but beautiful scene. The sun is rising over the Sea of Galilee. There is the scent of charcoal and the crackle of a small fire on the shore. And there is Jesus waiting with bread and fish, calling out to his friends: “Come and have breakfast.”

There is something deeply human and comforting about this resurrection appearance: there is no grand speech or list of tasks or commandments. There is simply an invitation: come, eat, and be together. It must have seemed like a return to the heady days of following Jesus: another fruitless night on the lake, followed by a miraculous catch of fish. It was a strange repetition of the time when Jesus had first met the fishermen, preached from their boat and then encouraged them to put out into deep water and let down their nets. Here though is a story with certain opposites: Jesus is not in the boat with them, but on the shore. Here Peter does not ask Jesus to leave them, but jumps into the sea to swim *to* him. When they all get to shore there is a nice fire already prepared, ready to cook breakfast.

We know that it is crucial to remain in close contact with those who are important to us in order for the relationship to be maintained and flourish. It was important for the disciples to remain in contact with Jesus during his earthly ministry. Even after being sent out on missionary journeys they would regroup with Jesus to discuss their ministries and to renew their bonds of fellowship. Our relationship with God is no different. This will be nurtured by frequent “letters home” (we call them prayers in the trade) to keep God with us in our daily activities. As we come together week by week, we remember and give thanks to God in our worship, yet we also find God through our contact with others, - when we work with and among them, and in those interactions with others which seem so ordinary, but in which we try to live out Jesus' teaching. It is in the people around us that we truly see the resurrected Christ.

Lately we have seen much fracturing of community in society. Although “us and them” attitudes have always been present, lately it seems that the lines we draw between ourselves and others have become more pronounced: lines between people of different races, or different genders, sexualities, economic situations, “natives” and immigrants. The Gospel as a whole shows the importance of community, of drawing together: the disciples were a mixed group of people, even more so if we expand our notion of disciples beyond the inner twelve to the many other followers of Jesus. Community Reminds Us We're Not Alone - when the disciples go fishing, they go together. They don't scatter in their confusion; they stick with each other. Even when they fail—when the nets come up empty—they are side by side. They fail together. How often do we feel like giving up when things don't work out? But in community, we're reminded that when we pull up the nets, and find they are empty, we can lean on one another in those long nights.

Community is also where Jesus Meets Us. Notice that Jesus appears to them not in a temple or on a throne, but on the shore—while they're doing their ordinary work. He calls out, gives them guidance, and then prepares a meal for them. They eat the meal together, perhaps even after they have become frustrated with one another, and may reach the dawn light having exchanged cross words at yet another empty net. Community is sacred not because it's perfect, but because Jesus shows up in the midst of it—right in the mess and the mundane. He meets us around shared tables, shared struggles, and shared joys. He meets us in the most ordinary moments of our lives.

After breakfast, Jesus turns to Peter—the one who had denied him three times. Three times he asks him “Do you love me”, giving Peter a chance to affirm his love and be restored. But then, Jesus gives Peter a task: “Feed my sheep.” Community is not just for comfort. It’s where we are healed and then called to care for others. It’s where we are both fed and called to feed. Community is both a joy and also a responsibility.

Just as those disciples saw the risen Christ that day, and his presence made the ordinary extraordinary, may we too see Him in our lives. As George Herbert once put it: “Heaven in ordinary”.

Now please join me in prayer:

Gracious and loving God,  
We thank You for the gift of community —  
for friends who fish with us in the long nights,  
and for the Saviour who calls us to the shore at dawn.

Amen.