

The Importance of Breakfast

John 21:1-14

Nutritionists often speak about the importance of eating a good breakfast. The most important meal of the day, it is often said. I would tend to agree, for while I almost always enjoy a good, balanced full-course meal either at lunch or dinner, still it is the nourishment and energy provided by the first meal that keeps me going throughout the day.

Our text this morning describes a breakfast meeting between Jesus and his disciples, but the main point is not nutrition. Nor is the main point highly figurative and allegorical explanations given by some interpreters. Specifically, the mention of 153 fish caught does not mean that there would be 153 tribes or languages in the world all who will hear of Jesus. Or that there are 153 different kinds of fish. Or that the number represents 100 for the Gentiles, 50 for the Jews and 3 for the Trinity. Or that the total represents the sum of all the numbers from 1 to 17. All such suggestions are actually put forth by different commentators, and something is very wrong with a person who reads this text from John 21 and takes the time to figure out that adding the numbers from 1 to 17 amounts to 153. I have to wonder, "How much time did it take to figure out that out?" But maybe an even more important question, "Why?" Who does that sort of thing?

I have no intention of treating the Bible like a vast riddle book, offering to you clever and catchy explanations that offer no real knowledge or information about Christ. Instead, clear and straightforward explanation. Beginning with Jesus' power.

I. JESUS DISPLAYS HIS SUPERNATURAL POWER.

Really two miracles, first the gathering up of the large number of the fish after a night of fishing that had produced nothing. Then

the simple observation that the net didn't break, a detail that John considers worthy of telling us.

There was actually a third miracle, and that was the appearance of Jesus in the first place. He was no longer living continually with his disciples, but rather appearing on the scene suddenly and intermittently. There were at least 12 such appearances recorded for us in Scripture. Remember that we are in the interval between the resurrection and ascension. The forty days after his resurrection, when he appeared at various times to his disciples and to others. To what end?

To prove himself. To prove his power. In order that we might believe, as we studied last time.

John 20:31 "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

What must you believe? What is Jesus proving? First and foremost,

A. Jesus proves his resurrection.

He was establishing eye-witness testimony. He was qualifying and equipping the disciples to be the founding apostles of the church, enabling them to build the foundation upon which the church would be built. And so he appears to them.

v.1-2

And more specifically,

v.14

I do want to emphasize with you and enable you to understand how essential that was, for Paul defines that experience of seeing the Lord as the necessary prerequisite for

the apostolic office.

1 Cor.9:1 "Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?"

And then later in 1 Cor. 15, immediately after giving that glorious summation of the gospel truth, he testifies about the importance of the eyewitnesses.

1 Cor. 15:5 "...and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. "

Those were his credentials, so that he could preach about the resurrection, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

Jesus proves his resurrection. And, therefore,

B. Jesus proves his authority over all things.

Even fish!

v.3

Now, on the level of a human interest story, that is so compelling. So interesting. Peter went fishing, and lest we unfairly criticize him for that, stop and think a little bit. These were ordinary men. Actually, quite impoverished men. And they had been with Jesus for three years, earning no livelihood. And they

were hungry!

Some commentators find fault with Peter for showing such a disposition to return to the world and to follow his worldly calling once more. But I would say, rather simply, the point of the fishing expedition was food. And those men had to work for their very subsistence. They were hungry!

And they had had a rough night. Nothing to show for their labors. And now they must be really hungry. So we read,
v.4-5

But Jesus has ordered these circumstances to be just as they are so that he can say this,
v.6

That is what you call power! Authority. You remember another story, don't you? The apostles must have remembered.

Luke 5:4 When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." 6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. 7 So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; 10 and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." 11 So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him."

Everything Jesus does has a purpose, a plan. And his plan is obvious. To display his absolute and unlimited power, his supernatural power and authority. He could command fish to be brought into a net.

It is he about whom we read,

Heb.1: 3 "...who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."

Jesus upholds all things by the word of his power. Therefore, I can ask, "What have you to fear?" That's really the application of this, as, I believe, it was for the disciples. "What have you to fear?"

Maybe you feel sometimes that you are out all night casting the nets looking for fish, and have come up empty. If so, I will point you to Christ, who promises to provide all that you need for life.

Mat. 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

And maybe you have sensed that the nets are pretty full. If so, I will also point you to Christ, and say to you, "He did it!" Supernatural power.

Secondly, let me note for you the,

II. VARIOUS RESPONSES TO JESUS.

Two are specifically mentioned, John and Peter.

v.7

Those reactions are quite typical of the men. John, with consistent humility, doesn't refer to himself by name, just as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." And he recognized the Lord first." He was the one who first believed in the resurrection. Here, with characteristic quickness and sensitiveness, he at once felt convinced that the mysterious stranger must be his beloved master.

How praiseworthy is,

A. The understanding of John.

How marvelous it is that he would be so sensitive, so keen-sighted. And so quick to tell others. He told Peter. And Peter believed him. How the church in every age needs such men of clear insight and quick perception, able to discern the presence of the Lord and the purpose of the Lord.

And then also men like Peter. Men of fervent and even impulsive devotion. Here we see,

B. The action of Peter.

Now, to be sure, Peter's impulsiveness was, at times, sinful and contrary to his faith. Impulsiveness, that goes beyond propriety and self-control isn't a virtue. But there is nothing here to criticize. The bottom line is that when he was told that it was Jesus, he couldn't wait to get to shore to be with him. So he jumped in the water and swam or waded whatever distance remained to dry land.

Here was what we might call reckless affection, fervent impetuous spur-of-the-moment zeal fixed upon Jesus. He thought nothing of the consequences, and acted without any reservation or indifference. Calvin describes it this way, "...A special zeal beyond the others seizes Peter...His leaving the ship and going ashore was not a piece of foolhardiness, but that he

went before the others in proportion to his zeal.”

Now, on a human level, I wonder how many wives would just be thrilled at such expressions of reckless affection from their husband! I wonder how many wives would wish for such spontaneous fervency and enthusiastic energy shown to them as an active demonstration of love!

And I wonder, how often in our appropriate wish to be reverent and dignified, that we go too far and squelch such spontaneous fervency and enthusiastic energy in response to Jesus. Peter’s example here is a worthy one, and his zeal praiseworthy. He had one thought, and really one alone, upon his mind. It was to be able to see Jesus once again. “He forgot fish, and net, and boat, and everything else, in his anxiety to reach Christ.

And so, in the kingdom of God, the man of action and the man of vision complement each other, both to the glory of God. Finally, let’s look at how Jesus responds. And it is very personal and affectionate.

III. JESUS GIVES HIS DISCIPLES PERSONAL ATTENTION.

First of all, avoiding all the superficial figurative interpretations as I mentioned in my introduction,

A. Jesus provided for the physical needs of his disciples.

They were hungry, and he fed them. They had been out fishing all night.

v.3

So Jesus engages himself with the men with a personal question.

v.5

Now, of course Jesus knew they didn’t have any food. Just like the occasion when a multitude of five thousand men had gathered to hear Jesus, with only five loaves of bread and two fish to be found for food. We read,

Mark 6:41 “And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all. 42 So they all ate and were filled. 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. 44 Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.”

Obviously, for Jesus, providing food was not a problem. But then, as here, don’t miss the personal element. He is not simply displaying his power in a vacuum. He is caring for the needs of people whom he loves.

v.6

Then,

v.9-11

But this isn’t about food, is it? This isn’t about the nutritional value of a good breakfast of fresh fish and bread. It’s about communion. Fellowship. Jesus didn’t appear to his disciples just to feed them, but to be with them.

B. Jesus communes with his disciples.

v.12-13

“Come and eat breakfast.” What a wonderful invitation. And it is such a natural thing, isn’t it? We do that with one another, don’t we? We invite people into our homes. “Come and eat dinner.”

I will often invite people to have lunch, particularly people I want to visit with, have an opportunity to talk with. “Come and eat lunch.” It’s a way of joining together a small portion of our lives. And it’s a great ministry.

It is how we commune with one another, have fellowship with one another. As a church body, we do it every week. We have a meal together.

In the church at Corinth, there was a full meal associated with the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, the so-called agape feast. And though Paul had to address and correct errors he found among them, still there was a direct connection between the sacrament and the physical communion of a normal meal. And that is why we call that sacrament the Lord’s SUPPER. Paul writes this in,

1 Cor. 11:20 “Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. 21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.”

As a corrective measure, he admonished them,

1 Cor. 11:33 “Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.”

A meal is a symbol of our communion. Our communion, in the form of the Lord’s Supper, is the outward demonstration of our fellowship together in the Lord. The food, of course, is not literal food, that is, you will not have enough food to satisfy your literal,

physical hunger. Just a taste of the bread and a sip of the cup. And Jesus is not literally or physically present, not carnally or corporately, as our Confession speaks. But in spirit. And in truth.

Therefore, in reality! The presence of Jesus, though spiritual, is just as real here as it was that day alongside the Sea of Tiberias. The the communion, the fellowship, which we enjoy with Christ is equally just as real as then. And the food he offers us isn’t 153 fish miraculously taken from the water. Rather, it is his own body and blood. Jesus had earlier taught his disciples this,

John 6:31 “Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” 32 Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 “For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” 34 Then they said to Him, “Lord, give us this bread always.” 35 And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. 36 “But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe...”

John 6:47 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. 48 “I am the bread of life. 49 “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 “This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 51 “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” 52 The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” 53 Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 “For My flesh

is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58 “This is the bread which came down from heaven--not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

And so Jesus says to us, “Come and eat breakfast.” Let me invite you this morning to another meal, a supper. But not simply the supper we will enjoy together this afternoon. I’m speaking of an even greater supper, and I am giving you an invitation that you will be able to accept only when we arrive in heaven.

Rev. 19:6 “And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! 7 “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” 8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. 9 Then he said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God.”

To his first disciples, Jesus said, “Come and eat breakfast with me.” To us, Jesus says, “Come and eat supper.” That is the invitation that Jesus gives to us even today. It is the invitation of the gospel. It is the invitation to heaven. An invitation to those who will believe in Jesus and receive the gift of eternal life.