

Rev. Jerry Deck  
John 21:1 – 14

May 11, 2014

Wake  
From Resurrection to Pentecost

According to John, Jesus has already shown himself to the disciples a couple of times before this scene which I have just read. So, the disciples now know that Jesus is alive, that death did not strike the final blow, and that nothing now is impossible. They have now had so many remarkable experiences with Jesus. They've heard his teachings, seen him perform miracles, dined with him countless times, watched him stand up to the powers of this world, lived through his crucifixion and by now have seen him up close and personal, alive and kicking. As John describes it in chapter 20, they have rejoiced with Jesus that he has been raised from the dead.

And so, we listen to the beginning of this passage and we wait with great expectation about what might happen next, what the disciples will be doing. John slowly builds up the scene by naming the disciples who were gathered together. And what will they be doing, we wonder? I mean, when you've experienced the risen savior well surely you begin to see that nothing is impossible, that the sky is the limit, that the world has been turned upside down. Or at least, as we saw with those Emmaus disciples last week, there is a sense of joy and excitement as they gather together. And so we wait to hear what these Easter disciples are doing, what problem they are tackling, what feat they are accomplishing.

And Peter says, "I'm goin' fishin'." "Yeah," the others reply, "We'll go with you." What?! Honestly this sounds a lot less like a people who have seen someone raised from the dead much more like me on a Friday night in college. My buddies and I, none of us big partiers, would sit around the house and say, "What do you wanna' do? I don't know. What do you wanna' do?" Until finally someone would say something like, "I'm gonna' go to Sonic." Alright, we'll go to." It feels a bit like the disciples have nothing else to do and so they just go fishing. Not nearly as exciting or adventurous as one might expect.

And, of course, there have been many theories thrown out as to why exactly the disciples decide to go fishing. Some have said it's because it's the one "real" thing they know to do, in a time when they have seen so many unreal things. Others suggest that perhaps the disciples' families have finally thrown down the gauntlet, told them they've been horsing around for 3 years with this Jesus guy and now it's time to start making some real money. Then others think that maybe this is simply the disciples default when they don't know what else to do.

The truth is that no one knows for sure and so I might as well throw in what I think it might be. Which is that this is how some of them first met Jesus and perhaps they're hoping by hanging out on the beach or going out on the water fishing, that they might see Jesus again. The truth is that Jesus had been somewhat fleeting after he had revealed himself to them, popping in for a moment and then disappearing. So, maybe they hoped that by going back to where they had first seen him, that he might show up

again. When you're not exactly sure how to move forward, sometimes you go back to what worked once, in the hopes that it'll work again. And, well, it did.

They don't though, initially realize it. Maybe it's because they're too caught up in their own frustration. And who can blame them, really? All night long they cast the nets again and again and again. They were supposed to be professionals at this and yet they keep coming up empty. Can you imagine how tired they are, how frustrated they are, how disappointed they are? No sleep, no fish, no Jesus. And on top of that they have some wisecrack who's now screaming out at them, "Hey kids, you guys caught anything?" The only thing worse than a bad day is some stranger who seems to be rubbing it in. "No" they respond, perhaps John graciously deleting a salty word or two. "Why don't you cast the net to the other side," the stranger so helpfully suggests. I imagine one or two of the disciples, perhaps Peter especially, mumbling something about how he'd like to toss this guy to the other side of the boat. But, they end up doing it anyway. What did they have to lose, really?

And all of a sudden this time, when they tug, the net gets snagged on something. Or at least that's how it initially felt, because this was the first time all night they'd felt something like this. Then as they keep pulling they realize that it's moving, if but slightly, and what is starting to draw closer is a team of fish. It was like a, like a miracle. Obviously one of the disciples knew it more than just "like a miracle" because he yells out, "It's the Lord." And perhaps before the "d" of Lord was even enunciated, Peter is in the water, swimming to shore. Peter was going to get to Jesus as fast as he could.

As soon as they arrive there is Jesus, cooking up a hearty meal for them of fish and bread. After bringing some of the 153 fish to chef Jesus, he invites them, as the host to eat of the bread and fish. He takes the bread and gives it to them, and though this is missing the blessing and breaking of the bread, there is no question that this is a familiar scene, yet again, of the living, resurrected Jesus, serving as the host, inviting the disciples to eat with him, gathering around a meal.

The theme for our sermon series has been "Wake" and one of the reasons we called it that is because a part of what we want to do is to wake up to where the risen savior is alive in our midst. It isn't always easy to see the risen savior, but the truth is that disciples of Christ have wrestled with this since Jesus' resurrection. It is easy for us to forget that we need to be awake to where Christ is alive around us in ordinary ways and ordinary days (as we talked about last week) and it's easy for us to be distracted, for lots of different reasons, from seeing Jesus. I think that one of the ways it's easy for us to get distracted is because, quite honestly, we feel like we're trying to be faithful, trying to obey Jesus, and yet we simply don't see any results. And so, we grow disappointed and, though we might not say it out loud, we stop looking for him and seeing him.

One of the reasons I love this story is that it gives us a vivid picture of what life as a disciple of Christ can sometimes look like. You're out there, all night, throwing their nets out again and again, even though they had no fruit from their labor, wondering what they're doing wrong or if they'll ever be successful again. Then Jesus comes out

and all of a sudden they are bringing in more fish than they could handle. And this is a great parable, if you will, of Jesus' words earlier in his ministry when he tells the disciples that the Lord, (in other words, not them) is the Lord of the harvest. And as a pastor and Christ-follower, I find that remarkably hopeful. It is a great reminder that our call is not to be successful, but to be faithful. As a group of hard-working folks, I think I need to say that one more time. When it comes to our serving God, our call is not to be successful (that is ultimately God's work), but to be faithful. Now that doesn't mean that we don't try to be successful or that we aren't worried about being fruitful, but it does mean that the results are up to God. It also means that oftentimes something is brewing even if we don't see it with our own eyes. That though it may appear to be dark out, that the sun may be right there, ready to rise.

Recently I've been able to listen to those who are about to join ZPC as members. I got to listen to 6<sup>th</sup> graders describe their faith, what they've been learning this past year and how they've learned more about Jesus and each other. And as I thought about that I wondered how many ZPC'ers have thought about the fact that even in the midst of difficult and unsure times, that these young men and women are growing in Christ. That even though we as adults may be seeing empty nets that our kids are discovering the risen savior. And then getting to hear from the adult inquirers about why they are interested in joining ZPC. Some of these inquirers have been going here for 7 weeks and some have been going for 7 years, but getting to hear these 20 or so folks talk about what drew them and kept many of them here at ZPC was incredibly encouraging. It was a great reminder again, that though we may look around and say, nothing's happening, that not only are we not getting anything in our nets, the fish in our boat are actually jumping out, that really we often have no idea what Jesus is doing, what he is up to. We keep throwing out the net, keep following, keep obeying, believing and hoping that Jesus is working beyond what we can ever see, trusting that at some point we will see where Jesus has been at work. We don't give up, because we know that Jesus is there even if we can't always see him clearly.

But when we do see him we need to tell others. As soon as one of the disciples realized the stranger was Jesus what does he do? He yells out to the other disciples, "It's the Lord!" And this, of course, is exactly what we talked about last week when the disciples realized they had seen Jesus and so they ran back to tell the others. And, if you were here last week you will remember that I gave you homework for today. To look for the living Jesus this week or to help others experience the risen Savior. I told you to come back on this Mother's Day ready to share where you'd seen Jesus. And during our worship team meeting this week someone asked if I was going to follow up on the homework and really have folks do that. (I won't tell you who said that because I don't want you to get mad at Betsy.) And so, I thought well, it is two weeks in a row that we've seen disciples telling other when they've seen Jesus, so why not? Now I know that not everyone was here last week and perhaps we have some visitors so I don't want to put all of you on the spot, so here's what we're going to do. I want you to get up and go quickly find someone with whom you can share with them either where you saw Jesus this week, how you might have helped others experience Jesus this week or the thing you like most about your mother. You have three minutes. Go!

Now you may have been here last week and struggled this week to see Jesus and that's okay. So, the last thing I think we should see in this story is something that we've already talked about quite a bit in my short time here. Which is the strange reality that if we want to see Jesus perhaps the best thing to do, other than hanging out at a beach or going out fishing, is to take time to eat with others. Again, I know we've talked about this a lot, but the reason we've done this is because, well, Jesus is always doing it. He did it throughout his time here on earth, he did it last week in Emmaus and he's doing it again in our passage today. So, if Jesus is doing it a lot then surely we should pay attention.

One of the things that we as Christians often do is talk about the dangers of our culture and making sure that we don't allow it to shape who we are as a church and Christ-followers. Amidst all of that conversation, in all honesty I think we often overlook perhaps one of the most important things that we have allowed our culture to creep into our lives. And that is the infrequency with which we join in table fellowship. We are eating in our cars or with the television on or with our cellphones out in increasing and alarming rates. And make no mistake about it, that keeps us from truly having table fellowship. In the Ancient Near East, table fellowship, eating with others while truly engaging with them, was an intimate act. Jesus was always showing up at meals and if we overlook that, or regard it flippantly, then we are missing out on incredible opportunities to see Jesus. And if we want to see the resurrected Jesus in our lives, in the lives of our families and neighbors, then that means we probably need to learn to say "no" to some things, so that we have time to intentionally begin eating with others.

We at ZPC are in a culture that is remarkably busy, and so we have a great opportunity to lead by example and to be a witness to the fact that we believe there is something sacred, something life-giving, something Jesus-seeing about sitting down and eating together. It's one of the reasons why, when we had our inquirer's class this last time, we did it at someone's home, sitting around tables, eating and fellowshiping. This wasn't an ice-breaker or a cheap Friday night date, it was to say this is who we are at ZPC. We are a people for whom it is important enough for us to give up our Friday evening so that we can sit around with each other, get to know one another better, get to hear each other's story in deeper ways and get to see glimpses of the risen savior. It was great. And I think that this is something that must get into the DNA of who we are at ZPC. I would love to start going around in our community and having people say, "Oh, you pastor that church where people are always eating in people's homes and inviting their neighbors over to have a meal." Why? Not because I think we need to eat more or simply be friendly, but because I believe that Jesus shows up when two or three are gathered and when we are committed to taking the time to simply be in one another's presence and break bread it forces us to slow down, to listen and to wake up, to where Jesus might be working.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, wherever you are right now, know that the risen savior is with you. If you feel like you keep obeying, but aren't seeing the results, keep casting out the nets because the sun is about to rise. If you wonder where Jesus is amidst your

busy days, take time to slow down, invite someone to a meal, and look for Jesus in the midst of breaking bread. And then, as we said last week, be prepared to share with others the moments when you've seen the risen Jesus, that we might continue to celebrate the reality that Jesus is risen. That he is risen indeed.