

The Last Breakfast

John 21:1-14

May 1, 2022

First Presbyterian, Luling

Last weekend, when I was at Mo Ranch, right before sunset, three of us set off on a walk. All three of us wear glasses. One of us is in her 30s, one in her 40s, and one in her 50s. We reached the river right at sunset, and there were several groups of people out in canoes. One canoe looked particularly full, and we asked each other, “How many people are in that canoe?” We each came up with different answers. Three? Four—I think there are two kids in the middle? Just two? It was ridiculous. We were not that far away from the canoe, the canoers were all wearing bright orange life jackets, and we still couldn’t figure out how many there were. It can’t have been our age. Surely not. Our bad eyesight was definitely part of the problem. But it was really the lighting. If it had been noon, we could have seen better. But it was not really light and not all the way dark, and we had a hard time even seeing how many people were in that canoe, much less if we knew any of them. At least I wasn’t alone in my squinting.

It isn’t accidental, that John has the disciples set out to go fishing at nighttime, and then just as day breaks, Jesus appears. Or is it just as Jesus appears, so does the light? Light and darkness are a big deal in John. Think back to chapter 1: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” John chapter 3, when Nicodemus visits Jesus, it is at night, and he hears “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him might have eternal life.” The symbolism isn’t subtle, but it is significant. Darkness equates to disbelief, or ignorance of who Jesus is. Light equates to Jesus’s presence, and people’s trust in who Jesus is. So in the dim and fuzzy light of early, early morning, it’s hard to see. It’s hard to see exactly who it is standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. It’s hard to recognize that it’s Jesus. The time of day makes that difficulty literally and figuratively true. Literally because they’re like me and my friends at Mo Ranch. Figuratively because they’re struggling, still, to trust, because they know they can’t go back to being disciples as they had been, but they don’t yet know how to be disciples now, in this new reality with a resurrected Jesus.

They don’t know it’s Jesus, they don’t recognize the figure standing on the beach in the dim light of early morning. He calls out to them, and calls them “Children.” It’s not clear exactly how to take this word, but it’s probably not a

“Hey y’all” or “Hey, guys, you out there.” It’s more familiar than that, almost an endearment. Like I still call our kids “Sweet baby” when they get in or out of the car in the drop off line. It’s affectionate, loving, embarrassing if it’s your mom in the car line. Not your normal greeting from a stranger. That might have caused the disciples to look more closely, given the resurrected Jesus’s apparent habit of popping up unexpectedly. But they don’t. At this point, they take him for a stranger making conversation about fishing.

They aren’t catching any fish, so he tells them to put their net on the other side of the boat, and they haul in an overflowing net, full of fish. There’s a similar story in Luke, but it’s in the context of calling the disciples for the first time, and not a resurrection appearance. In any case, it is the abundance of the fish, like the abundance of the wine at the wedding, like the abundance of leftover fish and bread at the feeding of the 5000, it’s the now-familiar ridiculous over-supply of fish that opens their eyes. The disciple whom Jesus loved, who is the star toward the end of John’s gospel, says to Peter—It is the Lord! He recognizes Jesus in the abundance.

Peter hops out of the boat and rushes toward Jesus, no longer a stranger on the shore, but the Lord. The others, along with the net full of fish, make their way to the shore, too. They all knew it was Jesus, John says, so they didn’t dare ask him who he was. They knew. They recognized him. But it seems like they were still a little uncertain about how to act with this resurrected Jesus. I suppose I might be uncertain, too, not being too experienced with resurrected people.

Jesus serves them breakfast. He took the bread and gave it to them, John said. Then he did the same with the fish. John doesn’t have a last supper like the other Gospels—he has the footwashing story occurring on that last night. This last breakfast echoes the feeding of the 5000. And it echoes a thousand other meals they had shared. And it seems to me that it has a touch of a communion meal in it, too. You may disagree—it’s far from overt or clear. Jesus fed them, from abundance, a meal he prepared for them. They knew he was the Lord.

We have situations where we know we can’t go back to the way things used to be, but we don’t quite know how to go forward either. This pandemic is one of those, for sure, but there are others. We have situations where we don’t know how to act with someone. Those happen to me on a regular basis, but maybe my percentage of awkward interactions is higher than yours. We have situations where we have a hard time recognizing Jesus’s presence. This story reminds us that Jesus is present in the light. Jesus is present in tender and kind words. Jesus is present in abundance. Jesus is present in meals shared with love.

Let us both recognize Jesus's presence and be signs of his presence for others.