

Sunday, May 1, 2022

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

I sometimes wonder why some of the texts for the Easter season aren't used at a different time. I say that because they are some of the greatest stories in all of scripture. And we find them bunched together instead of being divided so that they become the focus of the week.

Today I could preach from Acts where we read about Saul's conversion to Paul. Saul the one who killed followers of Christ, now becomes an apostle and travels more than the others and has adventures that make us marvel.

There is a sermon also in our reading from Revelation as well.

And the gospel text contains at least one sermon. There are so many possible sermons. These are some of the great New Testament stories. These are stories we tend to remember.

So, my angst was around what is God's message for us today given the terrific texts that are before us.

After thought and deliberation I chose the gospel text for the sermon today – where Jesus is recognized at a meal -specifically, a breakfast of fish that he grilled for the disciples who apparently went back to fishing almost immediately after Jesus' resurrection.

Meals. Eating together. Gathering and sharing our God-given bounty is something all cultures seem to have in common and thoroughly enjoy.

Meals with friends and relatives, especially occur at holidays, festivals and sometimes on the spur of the moment are special.

It seems we all enjoy the company of others, especially as we gather around a dining room table, a picnic table, or a blanket on the grass. As long as there is food to share, we are prepared to share it and ourselves with others.

Even as we think about it now, I'll bet you all are thinking of special meals you've shared at special or just routine times. And as you reflect, you find we get comfortable, perhaps reliving entire conversations or at least several highlights.

A personal example – I remember a dinner at a restaurant nearly 21 years ago. Those in attendance were my wife and I, our son and his wife and her parents. As the meal ended, we were informed that our son and daughter in law were expecting the first grandchild on both sides of the family. I'm not sure I've ever seen 6 happier people. What a terrific surprise.

What are some surprises or conversations that stand out for you? Think about that for a moment or two. Who wants to share a quick story about a meal that turned out to be special or significant.....

Possibilities: engagement announcement, securing a new or first job, retirement announcement, etc.

I'm sure throughout the day and week we'll remember more.

It's also likely that we might learn more sobering facts as we gather to share a meal. We might learn of the death of a friend or relative, an upcoming surgery, a pending divorce, or a terminal diagnosis.

And while we prefer the more celebratory remembrances, these also are part of our shared experience. All these times are ones where we tend to make workable plans and opportunities to add others to our prayer list.

The important part is that we are gathered around a meal, or dessert or maybe just coffee. We share ourselves with others. And as we do we get to know others better and on a different level. And we believe that together we are stronger than by ourselves.

Together we believe that by sharing experiences we are perhaps more in control, or at least that we have a fighting chance.

We give thanks for those opportunities to be together. We remember them. We treasure them.

In our gospel text today, the risen Jesus meets and greets his disciples but at first they do not recognize him. He directs them to cast their nets where there are so many fish that the nets are bulging.

While the disciples were fishing, Jesus remained on the beach, built a charcoal campfire and had fresh grilled fish awaiting the disciples as they came ashore.

Jesus, still not recognized by the disciples, gave them some bread to eat and then some grilled fish. And at this meal Jesus was recognized once again. Jesus' presence changed everything about that gathering, that shared meal.

Jesus speaks to Simon Peter and is recognized as the risen Lord. The conversation between Jesus and Peter is an interesting one. Jesus asks Peter a question three times and Peter responds with almost the exact same answer. Jesus asks, "do you love me?" and Peter responds, "yes...I love you." Please note that Jesus asks the same question three times – just as many times as Peter betrayed Jesus.

With each answer Peter gives – Jesus gives a directive, actually a mission for Peter, and the others, who undoubtedly were listening. "Feed my Lambs." "Tend my sheep." "Feed my sheep."

In other words, do for others what I have done and continue to do for you.

After a night's fishing with a monstrous catch, after a prepared breakfast Jesus makes himself known and gives the disciples a synopsis of what they are to be about from that time forward – feeding, tending the followers of Christ.

If you are like me, you can picture yourself at that meal with Jesus and the disciples. We can see the fire and smell the fish. We can see ourselves sitting among the disciples, eating, and talking, and listening in on the conversation between Jesus and Peter.

And we are aware that Jesus is not only speaking to Peter and the disciples but also to us. "Do you love me?" we hear Jesus ask three times. And we, like Peter, respond in the affirmative, "Yes Lord, we love you."

"Okay then. Feed my sheep, my lambs. Care for others as I care for you now and as I always will. Do what I do, follow my lead, my example."

We know that after this encounter, Jesus continues to be recognized by others and then he ascended into heaven. And then comes Pentecost, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And then the disciples spread out and teach and preach and become good shepherds as Jesus commanded.

But what of us? What do we do after breakfast, after Jesus and the disciples leave the campfire? The disciples likely return to their great catch. But what about us?

Do we simply arise, give thanks for a wonderful meal and conversation, and go back to whatever it is we were doing?

Or are we changed after enjoying fish grilled by Jesus for breakfast and Jesus giving us a mission to complete?

We keep saying within the church that the resurrection has changed everything. To that I would add – and everyone.

What does tending and feeding the risen Lord's lambs and sheep look like to each of us and us together as a congregation of Christ's one church?

My suggestion, homework if you will, is to go home and enjoy a meal with others. Enjoy one another and laugh a lot.

Then make the experience memorable by asking the questions I just asked. What a meal and conversation that will be.

Thanks be to God Amen