

Easter 03 C
April 10, 2016 :: John 21: 1–19
Fr. Jim Cook

“We’re Fed, So We Can Feed Others.”

Our gospel reading this morning comes from the very last chapter of John’s Gospel. What’s interesting about that, is the fact that most scholars agree that the last chapter wasn’t a part of the original manuscript. And they believe this to be the case because of how the previous chapter ended. After the resurrection appearances of Jesus to the women by the tomb, to the disciples gathered behind locked doors, and to Thomas a week later, the very next paragraph is this:

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (John 20: 30–31).

That does sound like a kind of wrap-up, doesn’t it?

But for some reason, and at some later time, somebody thought a little more was needed. And I’m glad they did, because what they added was lovely, and we would be poorer without it.

Last Wednesday, Peggy and I served dinner at the Canterbury Center. And because Fr. Jeff was out of town, I stood in for him at the Eucharist. And we had the nicest conversation about these verses. One of the students said this was his favorite part of the Bible. And I talked about how fascinated I was that there were so many parallels between what went on in our gospel reading, and what went on earlier in Jesus’ ministry.

For example: Here, at the end of Jesus’ ministry, we hear how the disciples fished all night without catching anything. However, and at the outset of Jesus’ earthly ministry (in Luke’s gospel), we hear how the soon-to-be disciples fished all night without catching anything. And in both cases, Jesus gives them instructions which result in their catching *a lot* of fish.

Also, in our gospel reading, Jesus provides his followers with a meal of bread and fish. Earlier in his ministry, Jesus provided a meal of fish and bread to 5,000 people who had come to listen to him.

Here, in our gospel reading, there is a charcoal fire, beside which Peter professes his love for Jesus three times. Earlier in John's gospel, while Jesus was being questioned by the religious authorities, it was next to another charcoal fire that Peter denied even knowing Jesus three times. And so on.

I really find these parallels so very compelling, and I was tempted to try to tie them all together into something meaningful for this sermon. But in the end I decided to focus on the meal Jesus provided, and on that three-part conversation between Jesus and Peter:

Where Jesus asks: "Peter, do you love me?"

And Peter replies: "Yes, Lord, I love you."

And then where Jesus then says: "Feed my sheep."

That's what I wanted to talk about.

However, and for the purposes of this sermon, let's pretend that it's not about Peter; instead, let's pretend that it's about you or me. Now, in that case, this changes our story from being about how Jesus feeds *Peter* and then commissions *Peter* to feed his sheep, and becomes a story about how Jesus feeds *us* and then commissions *us* to feed his sheep.

On the surface it can sound a bit like a tit-for-tat transaction: I feed you, therefore you feed others. But I think more is going on. In fact, we can take our interpretation and "kick it up a notch." (An Emeril Lagasse reference? How pathetic is that?)

Let's go on the assumption that this is a story that describes how Jesus feeds us *in order that* we might be able to feed others. Now I think we're getting somewhere because, now, it's starting to sound more like a commissioning than a transaction. And I think this is a fair interpretation because the theme that *God blesses us in order that we might bless others* is repeated over 300 times throughout the Bible. 300 times! That's a big deal and we need to pay attention to it.

So, if we've been fed by God so that we might feed others— if we've been blessed by God so that we might be a source of blessing to others— that raises two questions.

The first question is this: Where are you being fed and blessed? I assume, because you are here this morning instead of someplace else, that you're being fed here, and you're being blessed here, at St. Andrew's.

But how? Are you being fed and blessed by the worship or the fellowship? Are you being fed and blessed by the sacraments or the sermons? (Please, God, let it be the sermons!) Or are you being fed and blessed by the classes or the music?

Think about how you're being blessed and fed. And then think about the fact that, if it feeds you and blesses *you*, it probably would also feed and bless others— like your friends, or neighbors, or coworkers. And they might appreciate an invitation to a place that would bless and feed them.

So think about that for a moment.

The second question is related to the first. I think one of the points that our gospel reading is trying to make is that whatever feeds us *is where we need to be*; it's where we need to focus our time and attention, and our efforts. We need to *be* wherever we're being fed, *and* we need to support it however we can.

Therefore, the second question is this: What are you doing to feed and bless others?

It seems clear to me that if one of the major themes running through the Bible is that God has blessed us so that we might be a source of blessing to others; therefore God has also *fed* us in order that we might be a source of feeding to others; and, that God has *supported* us in order that we might be a support for others. Hence the question: What are you doing to feed others?

Fortunately, there are plenty of ways to do that here at St. Andrew's. Think about everything going on here: there are plenty of opportunities to take part in worship, outreach, education, pastoral care ... you name it. And while it's all here to take care of *our* various needs, it's also here to provide you with whatever it is that you need to help take care of others. It's all here, just waiting for you.

Jesus asked Peter, just as he asks us: "Do you love me?" And we, just like Peter, answer: "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." And Jesus says to us, just like he said to Peter: "Then follow me, and feed my sheep."

Amen.