

“WHAT’S FOR BREAKFAST?”

John 21:1-19

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Yesterday morning I ate the last hard-boiled Easter egg for breakfast. I tend to be one of those “save the best for last” types so this was the bonanza work-of-art egg that Mikaela made; you know how it goes, we’re all dipping our eggs in the colors and feeling quite proud of our pretty dye jobs and then Mikaela bounces into the house after basket ball practice, says sweet complimentary things about our eggs all lined up on the counter, picks up an egg and - with the inner vision of a Monet, unending patience, nerves of steel and a completely steady hand - begins, carefully rotating her egg a sixth of a turn in each bowl of dye for several minutes, overlapping the colors, no moving or distracted attention so the edges are perfect until she has created something that could be on a Good Housekeeping Easter edition magazine cover.

So, the eggs are all eaten, the candy is gone, the Easter baskets and decorations are back in the box (if not in the attic) and we’re thinking about summer camps and graduations and tomato starts. Easter’s over.

The first couple of weeks after the Easter events we find Peter and James and John and Thomas and the rest of the disciples holed up in that upper room in Jerusalem, shutters closed, doors triple locked, lights out, freaking over their own safety and then even more freaked out when Jesus walks through all those layers of defense to greet them and engage in conversation about doubt and belief and miracles and God’s power and eternal life and believing in what cannot be seen and other mind-boggling topics.

But now (at least as John reports) it’s week three and Peter says, “I’m going fishing.” “Back to life, back to reality.” After all, someone’s gotta bring home the bacon – resurrection or no resurrection, there are hungry mouths to feed back at the ranch and next month’s mortgage payment to meet.

Okay!! Fishing is something that these folks know a lot about. Something familiar, something comfortingly uncomplicated and normal. “We’ll go with you”, say the rest of the fisher-folk disciples.

Hmmm...so much for miracle season. A whole night out on the sea and zilch. Right! Life as it has always been. You win some, you lose some. Life’s a beach and then you die. Now how are we going to cover this week’s goat’s milk and pita?

But then in a bit of a déjà vu scenario, Jesus (unrecognized) shows up on the shore and (without the miracle of my son’s fish locator device) tells them just where to cast their nets to come up with a gi-normous haul - 153 fish – (but who’s counting?!)

Of course, by now, John catches on that this is Jesus (it is his Gospel, after all, so who would blame him for portraying himself as the bright one?) John tells Peter, who grabs his windbreaker (love the details in this account) and leaps into the water, followed by the rest of the crew and the

miraculously unripped net overflowing with the 153 fish.

It's the big build up...super dramatic. Maybe a little slow motion to increase the tension. You know how hard it is to run through water fully clothed and pulling some heavy object? (we've seen this on Survivor immunity challenges...) It's chapter 21, so you know we're working up to the big lollapalooza finish.

They finally make it to shore, dripping wet, exhausted, muscles straining, hearts bursting, and Jesus says..... "Okay then. Let's eat."

Let's eat? That's the big climax? Let's eat?

This may be my favorite moment in the Gospel of John. Because it's just so un-John-like. You know how Matthew, Mark and Luke are the gritty Gospels – babies born in smelly barns, stories about pouting jealous siblings, all those tax issues....John, on the other hand, is all Greek-ish – lots of symbolism and metaphors and oh-so-poetic.

And this is how it ends: "Let's eat." For those who love the Gospel of John for the symbolic metaphoric approach, he adds the poetic "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep."

For those of you who don't know, I am a retired preacher. For 32 years I spent countless hours almost every week pouring and sweating and praying and laughing and whining over sermons. I haven't preached a sermon since May 11, 2008. That's 23 months (but who's counting?) Mostly I followed the lectionary. Which means this passage in John came up every three years, at least, for thirty-two years. Let's see, doing the math – 3 goes into 32, well after, all I am a religious studies major so wouldn't want the math to be too complex, let's round it up to 33 'cuz 3 goes into 33 an easy no remainder.... 11 times!

Two years out, 11 times through – no this would now be 12! – and there may be no more profound line in all of Scripture than this: "Let's eat."

My Dad, Mike Mines, died on February 9th. Elizabeth knew my Mom and Dad well – she was their pastor when she was at Plymouth UCC in Seattle. They adored her, of course. (As do I.) Anyway, I was automatically nominated to share about Dad at his memorial service as we Mines sibs are all pretty shy and so I always get the public speaking parts ("you're the professional" they always say!) One of the stories I told about Mom and Dad was about our dinner table growing up.

Every night Dad would get home from work at 6pm. He'd drop that big old attorney leather briefcase with the clasp over the top in the front hall, come into the kitchen to kiss mom while she was fixing dinner, go upstairs and change his clothes, come back down to the kitchen and make himself a martini and eat a handful of peanuts. Then, like magic, at 6:30 everything was ready – the hot dishes hot and the cold dishes cold - and we would all sit down to a delicious dinner and eat and talk and talk and talk. We talked about politics and Vietnam, about movies and the Northwest Chamber Orchestra (which my mother helped found and nurtured through its many years of existence); we talked about racial integration and the women's movement and

religion; we talked about abortion rights and history and our family stories and Black power, the grape boycott and art and books and the possibility of life on other planets and whether my little brother and sister could watch *The Mod Squad* (we took a vote - my parents lost and they won.)

At that dining room table over those countless meals we learned to talk, to listen, to speak our mind, to disagree with respect and to be open-minded. But even deeper, at that dining room table we learned that we were loved.

Annie Lamott gave the commencement address to UC Berkeley a few years back. She talks about how she went to college (Grouton) at 18 for the best reasons – to learn to be a writer and how she dropped out of college at 19 for the best reasons – to learn to be a writer. She describes her long slow torturous (and of course hilariously funny) path to success as a writer.

“At some point I finally started getting published, and experiencing a meager knock-kneed standing in the literary world, and I started to get almost everything that many of you graduates are hoping for -- except for the money. I got a lot of things that society had promised would make me whole and fulfilled -- all the things that the culture tells you from preschool on will quiet the throbbing anxiety inside you -- stature, the respect of colleagues, maybe even a kind of low-grade fame. The culture says these things will save you, as long as you also manage to keep your weight down. But the culture lies. Slowly, after dozens of rejection slips and failures and false starts and postponed dreams -- what Langston Hughes called dreams deferred -- I stepped onto the hallowed ground of being a published novelist, and then 15 years later, I even started to make real money. I'd been wanting to be a successful author my whole life. But when I finally did it, I was like a greyhound catching the mechanical rabbit she'd been chasing all her life -- metal, wrapped up in cloth. It wasn't alive; it had no spirit. It was fake. Fake doesn't feed anything. Only spirit feeds spirit, in the same way only your own blood type can sustain you. It had nothing that could slake the lifelong thirst I had for a little immediacy, and connection.

It's magic to see spirit largely because it's so rare. Mostly you see the masks and the holograms that the culture presents as real. You see how you're doing in the world's eyes, or your family's, or -- worst of all -- yours, or in the eyes of people who are doing better than you -- much better than you -- or worse. But you are not your bank account, or your ambitiousness. You're not the cold clay lump with a big belly you leave behind when you die. You're not your collection of walking personality disorders. You are spirit, you are love, and you are free. You're here to love, and be loved, freely.”

It's about love – it's about relationships, it's about connection. That is the fundamental theological premise of our faith. Relationship with God, relationship with each other, relationship with our deepest selves, relationship with the Creation. And not just any relationship...but kinship. In our Hebrew creation story, the earth creature (adamah) does not become fully human until it has a relationship of kinship – adamah becomes Adam only when Eve comes into the picture. “This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh”. And once we humans figured out what that kinship/relationship is all about, according to our tradition, we were then called to extend it to all. When we can recognize that every other person, when all Creation, is “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh”, then we have arrived at the maturity of faith that we call the realm (kingdom) of God.

And it all starts at the dining room table. Let's eat.

My friend Maggie Bennington-Davis has an amazing story from her work at Salem Hospital when she headed the psychiatric unit there (she's now the Medical Director at Cascadia Mental Health in Portland.) They were having an increasing number of lock downs and restraint incidents on the unit – one of the patients had died while in restraint - and she was hired in part to get control over this problem. Maggie consulted other hospitals and experts in the field. The only suggested solutions all had to do with adding more controls. She knew that wasn't it. The problem was too much control, not too little. It finally came to her - completely radical and so unbelievably simple, something all those years of church potlucks and sharing communion had shown her. She offered her staff an additional benefit. If they would eat their meals with the patients at the table where the patients were eating, instead of in the staff room, the hospital would pay for the staff's meal and they could still have their break time to do whatever else they wanted. Such a deal! Staff began to sit at table with the patients and eat their meal and – you know how it is when you are sitting around a table eating together – pretty soon you're talking about your families and your hobbies and listening to one another's lives and sharing stories and feeling like you know each other in a new way. And then when you meet walking down the hall or across a very bad mental health moment, instead of looking down or away and pretending you aren't on the same planet together let alone in the same hall or going into defense mode, you are looking in each others' eyes to smile and say hello and stopping to chat about how it's going...and, thus, the climate and culture of the psychiatric unit of Salem Hospital began to change as staff and patients began to see one another as persons instead of as the roles they were each assigned by life's circumstances. This led to all kinds of changes – including a dramatic reduction in “time outs” and lock downs on the unit – from several a day to less than one a month. Maggie is now sharing this model with other hospitals around the country and around the world...a revolution in psychiatric care based on the theological assumption that it's about relationship – breaking bread together at the table. “Let's eat.”

It's so simple. It's about relationship. James Fowler - who wrote the classic book on faith development - notes five stages of spiritual maturity: 1) where we are not far from the chaos that was life-destroying and where a thick and controlling fence is constructed around our life by our faith in order to keep from getting sucked back into the chaos (fundamentalism – a lot of black and white thinking and “you and yours” as opposed to “me and mine” behavior which help a person keep from “sliding back”); 2) an accepting phase where we accept the faith we have received and are more comfortable with ourselves and our lives which seem pretty good as long as nothing much threatening happens to throw us off balance; 3) the questioning phase (often associated with adolescence) where we begin picking apart our faith or tradition and catching the inconsistencies and hypocrisies and disconnects and often exploring other traditions; 4) when we make it through stage three successfully, we usually come to another acceptance stage where we have taken what works from our tradition and discarded what doesn't and maybe added something from another tradition and finds a faith stance that makes sense for ourselves and our adult lives; and 5) what Fowler calls the “mystical stage”, where those of us who get there finally see that all is one – everything and everyone is related, we are all kin, and we act out of that kinship in all we do (the Gandhi's and the Mother Teresa and the St. Francis' of the world.)

It is to this fifth stage, if you will, that we are called by Jesus (and Buddha and the Ten Commandments and Islam) – to grow in our capacity to recognize that we are all related, kin, and that the fate of any of us affects the fate of all of us. (Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”)

And we don’t have to be miracle workers to work miracles – it’s as simple as the power in sharing a meal.

There is an old Jewish story - A rabbi asked his students when they can tell when the night has become the day. One student answers, “Is it when it is light enough to tell the difference between a fig and a pomegranate?” “No”, the rabbi answers. Another student says, “Is it when it is light enough to tell the difference between your dog and your sheep?” “No, that is not it,” replies the rabbi. Another student ventures, “Is it when it is light enough that you can tell whether it is your father or your brother approaching down the lane?” “No”, says the rabbi. “We will know that night has become day when you look into the eyes of a stranger and can recognize him as your brother.”