

Breakfast With Jesus

Sermon by Rev. Courtney Randall

John 21:1-8
John 21:9-19

May 4, 2024

I invite you to pray with me this morning:

Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you this morning.

So—what's for breakfast?

I'm guessing that, since church starts at 10 o'clock, most of you have already eaten—unless you're a hobbit and you're planning on having a second breakfast after this! But really, the question of *what's for breakfast* is at the heart of our Scripture passage today. It's about feeding and being fed.

Jesus invites the disciples to join him by a charcoal fire for a breakfast of bread and fish.

When my husband and I were serving with the Methodist Church in Latvia, we would gather for youth events, and young people from all over the small country would come together for overnights. In the mornings, breakfast would be dark rye bread, meat, cheese, and salted fish.

More recently, in Ireland, during our women's breakfasts at the Methodist Church in Sligo, we enjoyed traditional Irish food. But there was also a beautiful infusion of culture—pastries and fruits from our sisters who had come from the DRC, Ghana, the Philippines, and Zambia. It was a rich, diverse, and generous meal—a beautiful act of sharing. It was an invitation: *Come, have breakfast with us.*

In today's Scripture, we find the disciples in a boat, out on the sea. They know where they are, but they're not really sure what they should be doing. They're fishing—because that's what they know. It's familiar. And yet, it's a time of uncertainty.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus had told them to go to Galilee and wait for him. So they knew where to be, but maybe not what to do. Isn't that true for us sometimes? When life is uncertain, we return to what's familiar. Peter was a fisherman—so that's what he did. And it's no surprise we find him and the others fishing this morning.

They needed to eat. They were waiting for Jesus. But not knowing what else to do, they fished. All night long. Over and over again, casting out their nets. And nothing.

I don't know about you, but sometimes in uncertain seasons, it feels like I keep doing all the right things—I keep showing up, doing what I've always done—and still, my net comes back empty. I'm doing what I know, but the results just aren't there.

That's where we find the disciples: tired, hungry, discouraged. Have you ever been *hangry*? I imagine the mood on that boat was getting there. Fishermen are patient, but there's a limit.

And then—they see Jesus on the shore. But they don't recognize him.

And here's something I love: when Jesus speaks, he uses the ordinary, familiar language of a fellow fisherman. He calls out, "Children, have you caught any fish?" That would have been a common way fishermen talked to each other.

Jesus already knows the answer—he's 100 yards away; he can see the empty boat—but he still asks the question. "Have you caught anything?"

And the disciples answer honestly: "No."

They've relied on their own skills, their own strength—and it hasn't produced results.

So Jesus says:

"Throw your net on the other side."

And they do. That's the pivot. They don't abandon the boat. They don't quit fishing. They simply change direction. They cast their net on the other side.

And suddenly—abundance. They pull in 153 fish.

This is a very specific number—153. But you know what? Jesus often used numbers that had meaning. So why 153? Why not just say "a lot of fish"? There are biblical scholars—especially those who love numbers—who suggest there's symbolism here. 153 is what's called the *triangular number* of 17. What does that mean? Okay, here you go: if the sermon is getting a little long for you, here's a fun little math problem to try. Add $17 + 16 + 15 + 14 \dots$ all the way down to 1. When you do, you'll get 153. It's called a triangle number because it represents a perfect triangular shape when visualized.

Now, why would Jesus—or John, the gospel writer—choose a number like that? Some scholars believe the number 153 represents a full and complete harvest. Some say it symbolizes diversity—153 kinds of fish, meaning all the nations, all the people groups, all included. So the number itself may point to something more than just quantity—it may point to God's abundant, inclusive grace. A harvest that's full. A net that holds *everyone*.

But in that moment of abundance, the fishermen's eyes are opened—they recognize Jesus.

It's made me think deeply about the power of bearing witness to Christ's presence. What does it look like, as people of faith, to say: *I see Jesus here. I see God moving in this place.*

I remember my first experience bearing witness. It was 35 years ago. This church had sent a group on a mission trip to West Virginia, and I was asked to speak about it. I was 15 years old. I didn't want to speak. I was terrified.

I had written my message on a piece of paper that I folded and unfolded so many times it started to rip. But I remember standing here, looking out at the congregation, and feeling encouraged to share.

We had been working in the hollers of West Virginia on a small house for the Ramey family. Mr. Ramey had worked in coal mines since he was 13 and was now dying of black lung disease. His wife, Missy, was a woman of deep prayer. Every day while we worked, she sat in her butterfly garden and talked with Jesus. She prayed with such confidence, such trust, such *intimacy* with God.

Her prayers changed my understanding of what it meant to know Jesus.

And that moment—that witness—has stayed with me all my life.

Because bearing witness means sharing where we've seen God show up. It's part of our faith. In the Methodist Church, we say we offer our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service—and our *witness*.

The world tells us: you don't have enough. You *aren't* enough.

But God says:

You are.

Your nets are not only full—they're overflowing.

That's the message Jesus gave the disciples, and it's the message he gives to us.

It's not always easy. I remember last year, here in Sligo, we were preparing for Vacation Bible School. Our leaders were tired—burned out. The same people had been doing the same work for years. There was talk of cancelling. But then something shifted.

We looked to the other side.

The church had recently welcomed several refugee families. These women and young adults came with very little—often just a suitcase—but they *wanted* to be involved. They just needed to be *asked*. And when they were, they stepped in. VBS looked different—but it was beautiful. It was abundant.

One of the young leaders told us, “No one's ever asked me to help before.”

Invitation. Belonging. Abundance.

That is the vision of God's kingdom on earth.

Jesus feeds us—physically and spiritually—so that we can go out and feed others.

This passage ends as it begins—with breakfast. Because Jesus knew: the disciples needed to be nourished before they could go out and serve.

So brothers and sisters—thank you.

Thank you for feeding us as a missionary family.

Thank you for your gifts, your prayers, your encouragement.

It has not always been easy, but we are so grateful.

Some of you I've known since childhood. Many of you are new faces. But each of you is part of this story. Part of this mission.

So in conclusion, as we wrap this up—we start with breakfast, and we end with breakfast.

There's something sacred that happens when we sit together at the table. When we share communion. When we break bread. When we feed one another—so that we can go beyond these walls and bring nourishment, and hope, and ministry into the world.

So my encouragement to you this morning is this:

Bear witness to Christ's presence—in ordinary ways, and in extraordinary ones.

Because when we bear witness to Christ, we offer the world the good news it is so desperate to hear.

