

## ***Breakfast Is Served***

A Sermon for Morning Worship with Communion  
United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC

May 5, 2019

Text: John 21:9-14

Peter and I have recently created a new routine for ourselves, something we are trying to do as a form of self-care. Often these days when folks talk about creating a new routine they are trying to eat a more healthy diet or get more exercise. Our new routine is definitely not that, but a good one for us I'm convinced. What is this routine? Well, it involves donuts and supporting a new local business in our neighborhood. Every Saturday morning Peter and I go to Proud Mary's gourmet donut shop for a wonderful cup of hot coffee and the most incredible donuts made fresh while you wait. Then, these scrumptious donuts are topped with a variety of toppings according to your specific preferences. My favorite is the Sea Foam which comes with a light honey glaze and just a pinch of sea salt. Peter prefers the Bacon Bomb. Enough said.

This new routine has quickly become our favorite part of the weekend, no offense to Fellowship time here. But it's not just about the donuts. It's more about the reality that this place is fast becoming everyone's favorite place to come on Saturday mornings so we are getting to know more of our neighbors than ever before, even though we've lived in the neighborhood for 15 years. It's wonderful! It's also a great feeling to support this local business

being started by young folks the age of our kids. To top it all off, it's a living reminder each week that our neighborhood really is a great place to live. We always leave with a smile on our faces and a sense of deeper connection to the folks around us.

This whole notion of connecting with folks over food is an ancient one. In fact, it's why in Middle Eastern cultures like the one in which Jesus and his disciples lived, hospitality to friend and stranger alike was and still is considered the hallmark of what it means to be a good person, a person in right relationship with God and other people. The past decades of unceasing conflict in that part of the world has made this cultural reality invisible to outsiders, but it is still there. Just as it was in Jesus' day. This notion of gathering together around food is central to various religious communities all around the world. Many of the holidays of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Native American religious practice include bounteous feasts at which God is celebrated and invited into the midst of the people's lives. We experience it in our church today not only in the celebration of Holy Communion as we did this morning, but also in the potluck luncheon we'll enjoy together later this morning. Food and faith just go together because people need nourishment of the body, mind *and* soul.

This is why the story we read this morning about one of the Resurrection appearances of Jesus is one which resonates with us so much. Yes, this story is about a time when Jesus appears to the

disciples yet again, living proof that he had, in fact, been resurrected. But it's also about reinforcing the lessons he had taught them in the work they did together before everything changed with the crucifixion. Consider the scene this morning's text describes. Some of the disciples – the ones who had been fisherman – had returned to that livelihood once again now that Jesus as they had known him was no more. They were out fishing and someone notices Jesus on the beach, but don't recognize him. They'd had a bad night of fishing so when this stranger suggests they let down the nets on the other side of the boat, they did and immediately hauled in an incredible catch of fish. At this moment Peter recognizes Jesus and this is where the part of text we read this morning begins.

The disciples race ashore in almost comical fashion, Peter stopping to pull on some clothes out of respect for Jesus before jumping into the sea to swim to shore. Meanwhile Jesus has started a fire and is already cooking some fish and baking some bread. So, when the disciples finally arrive on the beach, breakfast is served. In this moment Jesus was once again modeling for them what it meant to be a servant leader as he served them the food they needed to nourish their bodies and the hope they needed to nourish their minds and souls. It was at the moment he shared the bread with them that they knew beyond

any doubt that it was Jesus alive again, taking care of them and their needs.

An additional significance to the appearance of Jesus to the disciples at this meal is also worthy of our notice. This has to do with the simple fact that by preparing food for and eating with the disciples Jesus is proving to any doubters that he is actually resurrected – come back to life. In other words, he is not a ghost or a spirit. He is a flesh and blood man once again. This point would have been very important as the stories of the resurrected Jesus began to circulate in the late first century because, at this point in time and in this culture, there was wide spread belief in ghosts and spirits of the dead returning to torment the living. This particular story, therefore, would have been crucial in putting to rest any negative connotations of Jesus' appearances to the disciples by emphasizing that he had truly been resurrected to new bodily life and not the ephemeral life of a ghost. The Resurrected Jesus was real, meaning the defeat of death and sin he had promised had been realized.

No wonder the disciples were so excited as they experienced Jesus cooking breakfast on the beach! No wonder Peter jumped off the boat and swam to shore as fast as he could! Jesus was back! Hope was resurrected! The new life Jesus had promised was still possible! But, wonderful as this scene is to consider for us, incredible as it must have been for the disciples to experience,

things *were* different than they had been. Jesus was not dead, but neither was he in the world in the same way. For most of the time, the disciples were still left on their own to figure out what would come next for them. They would be the ones to take next steps, to do what needed to be done for the Good News of Jesus to spread beyond their small but devoted group. Jesus was back among them, yes, but in a totally different way and for only a short time. It took them awhile to understand this and their growing awareness is what we focus on in the church during this period of what we call Eastertide.

As the disciples continued to encounter the Risen Christ, they were quite literally betwixt and between. They were still Jesus' disciples but clearly things were very different than they had been before. But what did that mean? What would it mean going forward? What was Jesus expecting of them? What was God expecting of them? This was their reality in the moment they sat down to breakfast with Jesus on the beach, gathered around a charcoal fire and eating grilled fish and fresh baked bread. A beautiful moment, for sure. A life affirming moment, absolutely. But then what? That they still had to figure out. And it's in this moment of already, not yet where we can relate to the disciples so personally. We know what it's like to feel betwixt and between. We know what it's like to understand in our heads that something has ended and still have no clue about what should come next, or

even how to figure that out. We know what it's like to come and celebrate hope and new beginnings in the midst of family and friends and then, that golden moment ends and real life comes back at us, full force. Then what?

Well, the end of this story clues us in on what Jesus thought about how this question should be answered. We didn't read this part of the text this morning, but you can always go back and read it for yourself. Take one of the pew Bibles with you if you'd like! If you do read the end of the story, you will see Jesus trying to coach Peter into seeing what comes next for him and the disciples – at least those who are willing to continue on with the work they had begun together. “If you love me, feed my sheep,” Jesus says to Peter three times. “If you love me, feed my sheep.” Do what we're doing right now, Jesus is telling him. Gather with people, share food and love and stories about how much God loves them. Tell them that new life is always possible, that hope never dies, that a new beginning can happen at any moment. Tell them that, Jesus says. And leave the rest to me.

Share the Good News of Jesus with folks – new life possible, hope re-discovered, and God's steadfast presence and abiding love. Tell what we know and let Jesus do the rest. Sounds simple enough that even we can do it! At least it's worth a try, right? And who knows what could happen right here in our own church. Amen.