

John 21:1-19

New Revised Standard Version

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

The disciples are back to business as usual, back to the same life they had been leading before they met Jesus. You get the feeling that they've lost their nerve.<sup>1</sup> What happened on Easter is yesterday's news. They might have been in the boat remembering the good old days and because they're living in the past, they aren't seeking Jesus in the present. They aren't expecting him to show up in any way that really matters.<sup>2</sup> Are we?

Jesus does show up because that is what Jesus does. When the disciples work in the dark, they catch nothing. When they come to the light, here come the blessings. Jesus shows up at daybreak and starts to ask some questions. Jesus loves to ask questions that he already knows the answers to, so he asks them about their catch. Without him, they have nothing. With Jesus, there is more than enough.

The last time we saw Peter he was standing next to a charcoal fire denying Jesus three times. Now, Peter is naked (metaphor anyone?). Peter sees Jesus and puts on clothes to jump in the water. Remember back in the Garden of Eden how nakedness and guilt and shame worked in that story? Peter comes to the charcoal fire by Jesus. There is only one other reference to a charcoal fire in scripture, when Peter denied Jesus three times. The reference to this same place is a reference to a place of failure and a place of redemption. Do you have a place like that in your life?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Soles, Jaime Clark. *Reading John for Dear Life*.

<sup>2</sup> Soles, Jaime Clark. *Reading John for Dear Life*.

<sup>3</sup> Soles, Jaime Clark. *Reading John for Dear Life*.

Somehow Jesus already has fish but he is the Bread from Heaven (chapter 6), so we shouldn't be surprised. Every table is Jesus' table. Jesus is always there before us, setting the table providing what we need. When we are overwhelmed with all that needs to be done in our professional, personal, church and volunteer life, Jesus offers us nourishment and restores all that we need. When we are exhausted by all of life's demands and feel like we have nothing left to give, Jesus invites us to sit down and rest.

Jesus invites the disciples to bring some of the fish that they had caught. He wants them to add what they have to what Jesus has already provided. That's true partnership. Jesus wants the same from us. Jesus needs our gifts, Jesus wants our gifts.

Then, we get to listen in to a really intimate conversation. Just as Jesus calls Peter by name, Jesus knows you and I by name. Jesus knows us down to every last detail of our lives, from the moments we are doing what God wants us to do to the moments we are not. Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" More than these is a bit vague.<sup>4</sup> Does Peter love Jesus more than the other disciples love Jesus? Does Peter love Jesus more than Peter loves the other people who are there? Or is Jesus asking if Peter loves him more than he loves all of this stuff – the fishing gear, the boat, the regular, workday life, what is familiar, what is comfortable? Do we love Jesus more than our car and our house and our clothes and our regular, workday life? Do we love Jesus more than what is familiar, what is comfortable?

Peter answers reflexively, as we all would. Yes, Jesus. Then feed my lambs and express love through radical hospitality. At the end of May in 2019, Wes Allen, preaching professor at SMU and Greenland Hills member, called me about New Church UCC. New Church was in need of a place to worship and Wes had suggested to their pastor, Rev. Jo Hudson, that she and I meet. They are a church with a very similar make-up to ours, families with youth, progressive, and many of their members are LGBT. The more Jo and I visited and prayed together, the more hopeful I became. Our leadership decided to host them because Greenland Hills is a church that cares about people. We are a church that is known for welcoming all people and for standing for justice. We are a church with a heart for mission and a heart to make the world a better place. Greenland Hills is a church that helps others. Greenland Hills is a church that feeds Jesus' sheep.

In August 2019 New Church UCC began worshipping in Glory Be Hall here at Greenland Hills. A month later we hosted an ordination service for a member of New Church. I joined Presbyterian, UCC, Baptist, Catholic, and United Methodist clergy to lay hands on James Coley who is serving as a hospice chaplain. One of my friends, a recently retired United Methodist pastor, Rev. Kathy McLean-Davis, preached at the ordination. She preached the sermon at the ordination because James grew up at a Methodist Church in McKinney and Kathy was his Associate Pastor. Kathy told the story of James receiving the Sunday School perfect attendance pin for many years when he was growing up. James loved being at church and when he was in college, he called Kathy and asked if he could come visit her. Kathy knew he was either going to tell her he was getting married or he was going to become a pastor. James shared with her that he did feel called to be ordained as a pastor in the United Methodist Church, but he also shared that he was gay. Kathy and James were convinced that the Methodist Church would change, but many years later, it still has not. If one of our youth wants to be a pastor in the UMC right now, I have to tell them that it is not possible if they are gay. *Right now*, we have LGBT young adults in the North Texas Conference of the UMC who are being denied an ordination interview because they are open about who they are. That ordination day, I looked around the sanctuary at Greenland Hills and thought about what a full circle moment it was. James was

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<sup>4</sup> Soles, Jaime Clark. *Reading John for Dear Life*.

being ordained inside a United Methodist Church and in the UCC denomination that welcomes and celebrates his ministry and his husband.

We have been talking about whether Greenland Hills wants to be connected with both the UMC and the UCC. We want to stay in the UMC because we want to change it. As our rainbow colored banners say in Glory Be Hall, we stay to stand with our LGBT family. The UCC structure allows every church to decide for itself what is best for them. They ordain gay clergy and host same-gender weddings. They are a progressive, social justice-oriented denomination. Ordination is one of the reasons Greenland Hills is exploring dual affiliation with the UMC and the UCC. That is radical hospitality. That is feeding my lambs.

Jesus asks Peter two more times if he loves him, and it seems to break Peter open and free him. When Peter denied Jesus, he willingly and willfully alienated himself from Jesus, the one who knew and loved him best. Peter denied and rejected love, faith, God, friendship, and hope. On the beach with Jesus that day, Peter learns that Jesus knows each of us intimately and meets us in our need. When the Samaritan woman needed water, Jesus was Living Water. Peter denied Jesus three times, so Jesus let Peter express his love for him three times. Jesus challenges Peter to show his love through service, through radical hospitality. Part of Peter's healing is his commission from Jesus to serve others. Jesus doesn't send Peter out to serve until Peter had understood that he was fully forgiven, loved without condition, and released from the paralyzing grip of guilt and shame. Jesus invites us to move past failure and to remember that Jesus came so that we might have abundant life.

Healing and life were never meant to be something just between me and Jesus. We are meant to feed God's people, *that is everyone*. Feed them. Follow me. It's so easy for us to fall into old patterns. Then Jesus comes and looks into our eyes and into our souls and asks us questions that seem obvious, painful, or offensive but turn out to be the only questions that matter.<sup>5</sup> As we answer, we move beyond rote response to wonder, comprehension, transformation.<sup>6</sup> Jesus wants us to feed his lambs and express our love through radical hospitality. Jesus gives us a tall order but one we can do. That's it. That's all Jesus asks. Thanks be to God, Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Soles, Jaime Clark. *Reading John for Dear Life*.

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