

“Potluck”

Sermon from John 21:1-13

Given Sunday, May 15, 2022

for the First Baptist Church of McMinnville

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Later again Jesus was manifested to the disciples at Lake Tiberias. This is how the appearance took place:

Assembled were Simon Peter, Thomas “the Twin,” Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, Zebedee’s children, and two other disciples. Simon Peter said to them, “I’m going out to fish.” “We’ll join you,” they replied, and went off to get into their boat.

All through the night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus was standing on the shore, though none of the disciples knew it was Jesus. He said to them, “Have you caught anything, friends?”

“Not a thing,” they answered.

“Cast your net to the other side,” Jesus suggested, “and you’ll find something.”

So they made a cast and caught so many fish that they couldn’t haul the net in. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved cried out to Peter, “It’s the Teacher!”

Upon hearing this, Simon Peter threw on his cloak - he was naked - and jumped into the water.

Meanwhile the other disciples brought the boat to shore, towing the net full of fish. They were not far from land - no more than a

hundred yards. When they landed, they saw that a charcoal fire had been prepared, with fish and some bread already being grilled. “Bring some of the fish you just caught,” Jesus told them. Simon Peter went aboard and hauled ashore the net, which was loaded with huge fish - one hundred and fifty-three of them. In spite of the great number, the net was not torn.

“Come and eat your meal,” Jesus told them. None of the disciples dared to ask, “Who are you?” - they knew it was the savior. Jesus came over, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This marked the third time that Jesus had appeared to the disciples after being raised from the dead.

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Any “Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me” listeners in here? It’s sort of a hybrid game show / talk show on NPR, it calls itself a news quiz show, and a lot of their games are sort of variations on the “two truths and a lie” game we’ve played here before. In yesterday’s game, a contestant was offered three suggestions for how to get away with throwing a fancy dinner party on the cheap. She was asked to pick which of the three suggestions was actually printed as a “life hack” in a newspaper this past week, and which two were lies made up by the show writers. Want to try?

The first: invite all your guests weeks in advance. An hour before the party, call a guest in a panic and say, “Oh my gosh, I totally forgot to make this one thing! Could you please run and pick it up and bring it to the party? It would save the dinner.” And then do the same to every guest on the list. Farm your whole menu out that way.

The second: instead of those expensive after-dinner mints, freeze a long line of toothpaste, cut it into little squares, and have your guests enjoy those.

The third: just before your guests are to arrive, have an accomplice call in a fake bomb threat to your apartment building. When they get there everyone will be standing outside, and you can suggest you all just go out to eat instead. No one will expect you to pay for a meal other than your own.

So, which is the real suggestion from the newspaper? (No fair shouting it out if you heard the show yesterday.)

It's the toothpaste! Do you think you would notice? Will you be suspicious from here on out?

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Even though it wasn't the life hack from the newspaper, people have been doing some variation on that first suggestion for ages, right? Have everybody bring something? It's sort of "Stone Soup"-ish, and it's also, according to today's scripture, sort of what the resurrected Christ does.

He's got fish, and bread, already cooking over the fire. And he asks them to bring some fish. Not the host who turns down help, who magnanimously says, "No, no, just bring yourself, I've got it covered." This curious stranger on the beach with

the fishing advice says, “Come over for breakfast. Bring the food.”

This is my favorite part of the story. 153 fish is an interesting detail, and scholars agonize over what that number might mean. Peter’s nakedness is a strange mention, and commentators try to explain it away. A heavy catch and unbroken nets - this idea that maybe we really can hold abundance - that might be worth exploring. But to me, this idea that the guy on the shore already has food for breakfast, and tells his guests to bring some, too - this is what’s worth talking about.

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I get to hang out at this place during the week, and you should know - even when we haven’t advertised a potluck, sometimes it becomes one. Last Monday a guy came in with a large hiking pack, sturdy frame, lots of pockets. He just wanted to give it to us. He thought there might be someone here who could use it.

Sometimes when it’s quiet in the office, I’ll hear someone playing the piano in the Gathering Room. Sometimes it’s a kid whose parent has come by to chat about something. More than once it’s been someone who said they came to church here years ago, played around on that piano then, and were just wandering back through, thought they’d see if they could still pick out a song.

People who long ago bought fabric for a quilt they've now decided they'll never make bring it here, because they knew there are people here who will sew it up into something beautiful, and deliver it to someone who could use some comfort. Whenever the doors are open, people wander in with need, and people wander in with offerings.

And then there's you. Then there's all of us, together.

Every time people come together in resurrection hope - which is to say, every worship gathering, every faith community - every one of those is a potluck. Everyone brings what they can - sometimes we whip something up with ingredients we have on hand, sometimes we make an extra effort to bring something special. Sometimes we sneak in and trust that other people will have brought enough to cover us this time, because we just don't have anything left. And we promise that another time, we will bring enough to cover for somebody else.

Potluck. We carry in words and songs and prayers, hopes and sorrows and joys, offerings and questions and affirmations. All of it is gift. From everyone, for everyone. Maybe what you bring you don't offer out loud, or in ways obvious to anyone but you. It's still here. It's still shaping the space. The individual spirit of what you bring speaks to the collective spirit that is created here. Without any one of us, without any one of the people who came before us, this community would not be what it is. For good or for ill, our congregation is the precise combination of all the hurt and all the hope that has ever lived

in the hearts of the people who made their way here, Sunday after Sunday, to call out for something, someone, beyond themselves. Who we are today is all that hurt and all that hope, and the transformative work God does with that, in all of us, when we come together to learn, to love, to serve, to seek justice and joy.

We belong to that history, we belong to that transformative process. And we belong to those who will come after us - we are bound to them through this faith that calls us to not only to remember but also to nurture, to imagine, to co-create with God and with one another.

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Remember this story, like so many of our resurrection stories, begins with people not quite knowing what's going on. But then they have this encounter, and they realize it has all the marks of the life they knew with Jesus. Each little detail is its own promise:

Cast your net to the other side. Where there is wisdom, courage, and newness, there is Christ alive.

153 fish. Where there is abundance, there is Christ alive.

Fish and bread already grilled. Where there is provision, there is Christ alive.

An invitation to bring some of what you have, with the promise that it will be folded into the whole. *Where there is genuine partnership, there is Christ alive.*

May we know the grace of these resurrection promises, in our own lives and in our life together, and may we share them.
Amen.