

Feasting With Jesus
John 21:1-25

December 23, 2018

SI: Between Thanksgiving and Christmas we do a lot of eating together.

That's one of the significant activities of the holidays.

In the Gospels, Jesus does a lot of eating with people.

It was one of the significant aspects of his ministry.

In fact, Jesus himself makes the point that he did not come to fast but to feast.

He says about himself: The Son of Man came eating and drinking.

So the way Jesus eats with people, and the how and why of his eating with them is an important part of his message.

Over this Advent Season we've at Jesus Christ, God in the flesh,
on four occasions where food and drink were being served.

Through these meals we've seen who Jesus is and why he came
and what a difference in can make in the lives of people who believe in him.

INTRO: Years ago I offended someone by handing something poorly.

I tried to reach out to him but there was a rift that wouldn't heal.

Then he called me out of the blue and asked me to come and eat supper with him. We sat at his table and ate, I was nervous at first.

But it's curious how eating with someone eating lowers walls.

And through that meal and the conversation that followed we were reconciled.

These seven disciples of Jesus had fished all night and hadn't caught anything.

In the morning light they saw a man standing on shore, he called out to them: Friends, haven't you caught any fish?

They reply: No. He says, Throw your net on the right side of the boat.

I ran across a funny remark by one commentator:

What fisherman has not had to endure the advice of others as to where he should cast his line or throw his net! Throughout centuries fisherman told where to cast. Here's this stranger on the shore doing that very thing.

But I guess they figured they didn't have anything to lose so they cast the net—and immediately it was so full of fish they couldn't haul it in.

That very same thing had happened one time when they were with Jesus before his death and resurrection. They had fished all night without catching anything.

Jesus told them where to cast the net and they had a huge haul of fish.

John is the first one to figure it out and he says: It is the Lord.

As soon as Peter hears John say that he jumps in the water.

When they get to shore, there is Jesus with a fire, some fish cooking, some bread.

He says, come and have breakfast. What was this meal?

The Christmas carol *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing* has a line:

“God and sinners reconciled”

That's what Christmas is about. That's why Jesus came. Reconciliation.

But reconciliation is an abstract concept.

What this story does for us is make it concrete. It's a story about eating with

Jesus, lowering the walls, as eating does, and then experiencing his reconciliation.

So let's look at this story and we'll see that Jesus came to accomplish reconciliation with three interconnected facets. He came . . .

1. to reconcile you to other people
2. to reconcile you to yourself
3. and to reconcile you to God

Before I go any farther, credit where credit is due, sermon by Dr. Timothy Keller.

MP#1 First, Jesus came to reconcile you to other people

Seven disciples went out to fish: Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, the sons of Zebedee (James and John), and two unnamed disciples.

Remember what Gospels tell about how different these men were from each other.

Nathaniel was the kind of person who didn't have any difficulty believing.

The first time he met Jesus, Jesus said: Nathaniel, I saw you under the fig tree.

We don't know what Nathaniel was doing or thinking there, but that's all it took.

He said, Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel.

Jesus says: Is that all it takes for you to believe? You'll see greater things than that

It's as if Nathaniel believed too easily. Might even accuse him of not thinking.

Thomas was the opposite. He would never believe so easily. Was a critical thinker.

He demanded evidence. Even after everyone said they had seen risen Christ,

I won't believe unless I see the nail prints in his hands and touch them myself.

We could say that Thomas is too cynical, too hardheaded and doubtful.

Thomas and Nathaniels usually don't get along.

Nathaniels think Thomases are skeptics and critical and dangerous.

Thomases think Nathaniels are gullible and anti-intellectual.

But here they are in the boat together.

Then there is John and Peter. John's thoughtful and careful.

He's the first one to figure it out and say: It's Jesus. But he doesn't do anything.

Peter, who is not so good at thinking things out, the only one who does something

He jumps out of the boat before they're even to the shore.

Peters and Johns don't usually get along.

Peters think Johns are too cautious, even cowardly.

They're the kind of people who always want to form another study committee.

Johns think Peters are impulsive hotheads who think they're always right but

usually mess things up. But here they are in the boat together.

Two disciples are not named, but we could imagine they were Matthew and the disciple called Simon the Zealot.

Politically Matthew was conservative.

He had worked hand in glove with the governing authorities.

Simon the Zealot was progressive.

He was part of a movement that wanted to overturn the existing structures.

They were both followers of Jesus and numbered with the 12.

Jesus Christ came to bring people together across every divide.

Personality, temperament, class, economics, politics—

people who otherwise would not have anything to do with each other.
He came to tear down walls that divide and bring people together into a fellowship where there is wisdom and mutual appreciation and even love.
And where is that happening? Where is Jesus doing that?
Where do we participate in Christ's reconciliation of people? In the church.
The church is where Christ is making a new society of reconciled humanity.

When you recite the Apostles Creed you say: I believe in God the Father Almighty.
And then you says: I believe in Jesus Christ. That makes sense.
If you want to relate to God and to Christ, you have to believe. Have to have faith.
What does it mean to have faith?
It means that you act as if what the Bible says about God and Christ is true and in doing that you find it to be true.

Have you ever thought what it means that the Apostles Creed also says:
I believe in the holy catholic (universal) church and in the communion of saints?
A Christian is someone who believes in the church.
It takes a tremendous amount of faith to relate to the church.
It means you have to act as if what the Bible says about the church is true.
You have to believe it's a supernatural community where Christ is reconciling people and bridging divides.

We tend to think the Christian faith is Jesus and me and my private devotions.
The idea that we participate in Christ's work of reconciliation by commitment to a local church, to a particular group of believers, and get to know them with all their quirks and odd personalities and differences—and to devote ourselves to the ordinary weekly rhythms of worship and fellowship—that cramps our style.
If it's just Jesus and me, I can hold the church at arms length and just take from it the things that please me. I like this. I don't like that. I'll take parts I like.
But if you do that, you'll miss seeing a big part of Jesus' work of reconciliation.

I saw this in our church last week.
As you know, we're grieving with Holmes and Kornegays death of Obadiah.
I have never done a funeral for a child, so I spoke to Billy Atchison, and asked What do parents need to hear? When you lost daughter, what comforted at funeral?
Billy said, I could tell you that, but Hope and I are different from Wes and Sarah. We're different people with different personalities.
He said, that's my advice to you. Minister to the Holmes as they are, but call Hope.
So I called Hope and she said: I do think there are some universal truths for all Christian parents who have lost children, she gave me some pearls of wisdom.

Here's what I saw in that:

Very different people, very different personalities, sort of people who wouldn't ordinarily choose to commit to doing life together—but bound together by the reconciling work of Jesus Christ.

You can't believe in the God and not believe in the church—

because the church is the place where Christ is reconciling people to one another.

But to enjoy and participate in Jesus' work of reconciling people—

you have to be reconciled to yourself. Brings us to our next point . . .

MP#2 Second, Jesus came to reconcile you to yourself

One reason we have a hard time participating fully and freely in the reconciled, supernatural community of God's people is that we often aren't reconciled to who we are—to our own reality.

Without Jesus you can't see or admit your own flaws and weaknesses.

So you'll focus on presenting an image to other people.

That means you can't be open hearted to other people, and give your self to them.

But Jesus came to reconcile us ourselves. The case study in this story is Peter.

Remember what Peter had done. At the Last Supper Jesus warned the disciples.

He said, I'm going to be taken and you will all fall away.

Instead of receiving that warning with humility and examining himself, Peter said:

Even if all the rest fall away on account of you, I never will.

Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.

I alone. I'm more devoted than all these other men. He compares himself.

The other disciples weren't so great spiritually, but they had enough self awareness not to say something that outrageous. Not Peter. Even if all fall, I never will.

Out of all the disciples, Peter was the most out of touch with his real self.

It was so important for people to see him as Jesus' most devoted disciple.

It was so important to him to compare himself favorably with other people.

Peter had to eat those boastful words.

During Jesus' trial, standing in a courtyard around a fire Peter was asked:

Aren't you a follower of Jesus? He said, I don't know him, I swear it.

It didn't just happen once, could have been a slipup, but three times.

Look what Jesus does. When they came to shore, a fire with fish on it.

Jesus brings Peter back to a fire. Pointed reminder of setting of his failure.

Not all, when finished eating, Jesus asked:

Simon, do you love more than these men love me?

Pointed reminder of content of his failure. Even if all fall away, I never will.

And that's not all, Jesus asked him three times, just like he denied three times.
Which is a pointed reminder of the thoroughness of his failure.

So Jesus recounts the setting, the content, and the thoroughness of Peter's failure.
He wants Peter to face spiritual and moral and psychological reality.
No more covering up. No more facades of his own goodness.
This seems so painful. It's like Jesus is twisting the knife.
He is, but it's a surgeon's knife, not the knife of a thief.

Because every time when Jesus says: You failed me and Peter says, I know I did,
but I do love you, Jesus. Every time Jesus doesn't question Peter's love.
Instead he responds with affirmation—
feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep.
You failed me. I know I did, but I love you and want a relationship with you.
Ok, says Jesus, now you're ready to serve. But I'm going to ask you again.
Out of all the disciples Peter was the most out of touch with who he was
and he had the greatest failure, but when he admitted that, Jesus affirmed him
and said, now you're read to be a shepherd of my sheep.

Dick Lucas is a famous evangelical Anglican minister, pastor of St. Helen's Church
in London for many decades. He's now in his 90s. Cambridge educated.
He has a very, very proper upper class British accent. Wonderful preacher.
He tells of a time when he was invited to speak at a Christian boarding school
in America for a week of chapel messages.
He was slightly horrified to hear the principle say to the students:
This week if any of you need personal counseling from Rev. Lucas we will allow
you to get out of class. Dick Lucas is a life long bachelor and he says:
"To put it mildly, I have always found children a trial."

But he found himself hour after hour having to listen these young students tell
him their problems. It was mostly 12, 13, 14 year old girls who took advantage,
and they would tell him about this boy in class who doesn't even know who I am.
It was torturing him. He felt angry with the situation. Angry at himself.
So he opened the Bible, and this is what he read: Feed my lambs.
When you feed a cat you get something out of it. Purrs, rubs against you.
When you feed a lamb you get nothing out of it. No connection.
Feed my lambs often means giving yourself to people from whom you get no
emotional or intellectual or social benefit. They're benefiting. You aren't.
How can you get that kind of shepherd heart?
How can you be that loving and that patient?

So you don't always evaluate a person before you spend time—will this person bring me social and emotional and intellectual benefit or not? Will I enjoy it?

How would you like to become the sort of person who is so full in yourself, so un-needy, that you're always tender, always kind, always willing to give time. What Jesus said to Peter, Dick Lucas, and to you and to me— that starts to happen when you allow me to reconcile you to yourself— when you see yourself as a moral failure forgiven and loved by Jesus Christ, and then commissioned by him to be a conduit of his love to unlovely people.

That's where it starts. But where does the power really come from?

It comes from Christ's ultimate work of reconciliation.

MP#3 Jesus came to reconcile you to God

Let's look at the last thing Jesus said to Peter. It's strange. A little cryptic.

He says: Peter, "I tell you the truth"—literally, Amen, amen I say to you—

which was Jesus' go to phrase when saying something of great importance— "when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

Then John adds:

Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

If you're going to embrace a person.

If you're going to hug them, you stretch out hands. You open your arms wide.

That's how you get close to a person physically.

There's vulnerability in that. You can't defend yourself. You could be punched.

If you wanted to be careful, you would keep your hands in a defensive posture.

Physical closeness requires vulnerability.

So does spiritual and relational closeness.

If you want to be close to other people on a meaningful level—

you have to be willing to open yourself to the possibility of being hurt.

Open to criticism. Open to disappointments and misunderstandings.

There's no such thing as closeness without openness and risk.

So Jesus says: Peter, you're going to feed my lambs and take care of my sheep by stretching out your hands, opening your arms.

But there's a double meaning in Jesus' words. Greek scholars say that this term stretching out your hands was an idiom for crucifixion.

That makes sense of John's comment: Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death

So let's pull this together.

Jesus is saying: Peter, the enabling power to be this kind of person I'm calling you to be, a man with a shepherd's heart, a man who feeds sheep, who is willing to stretch out his hands and open himself to those people who not only give you very little but might even hurt you . . .

Peter, that's going to come as you build your life on the pattern of my death.

I saw someone once wearing a Christian t-shirt.

The front said: "I asked Jesus, 'How much do you love me?'"

On the back was : Jesus said, 'This much.' Then He stretched out His arms and died."

And it had a picture of Jesus hanging on the cross.

I thought that was corny, kind of Christian kitschy. So of course I was judgmental.

Then I found out that very statement was made by great church father Athanasius.

A giant in the history of the Christian faith.

Athanasius says Jesus stretched out his hands on the cross to hug the world—and that by embracing the world he died.

That's what Jesus is saying to Peter.

Peter, you're going to build your life on the pattern of my death, and you're going to become so good at it that you're going to have to die for your flock like I did for mine. And you'll do it.

Did he? Yes. It's not in the Bible but church tradition says that when Nero began to persecute the church in Rome, Peter's congregation convinced him to run, so he ran, got out of Rome. But he realized many of them would be killed, unless the Roman authorities had him instead. So he went back and was crucified. Church father Tertullian says that as was being crucified, he asked the soldiers to crucify him upside down, because not worthy to be crucified like his Lord.

What changed Peter? How did he go from a man who denied Jesus three times out of trembling fear for his own skin, to a man who loved Jesus so much and loved his sheep so much, that he would die in this way.

It was a life-long, growing understanding and wonder and appreciation for being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

The first time, in Luke 5 when Jesus did a miracle with a catch of fish, do you remember how Peter responded to Jesus' greatness?

He fell on knees and said to Jesus: Go away from me. I am a sinful man.

The presence of Jesus was painful to him because it revealed his flaws.

Peter didn't like to see his flaws. That's how all of us are in our old self.

I don't like to see my flaws, because I prefer to see myself as a good person,

a competent person, a cool person, a devout person, or something—
and when I get into the presence of someone who makes me feel small
and flawed, I want to get away from him.

But this time, when Peter sees the same miracle, he flies to Jesus.

He can't even wait for the boat to get to shore.

Because his whole self-perception has been changed by grace.

Instead of his failures feeling so painful he wants to avoid them and flee from them,
now he wants to bring them to Jesus and experience his grace and reconciliation.

Over a lifetime, that sank in and changed him.

So here's what I want to tell you on Christmas Sunday.

Fly to Jesus. Don't let anything get in your way. Jump out of the boat and swim.

Bring him all your failures. All your sins. All your turmoil.

Bring him your fake, ugly self image, how you want to be seen by others.

Eat with him. Commune with him. Let his Spirit probe you with questions.

And receive his grace. It will change you into a more warm, loving person.

And don't ever quit doing that. Always keep looking at Jesus.

This story ends on a humorous note. Jesus is walking with Jesus on shore.

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (that's John)

When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

Jesus has just said: Peter, you're going to be killed. Peter says, Oh.

What about him? What about him?

Jesus, Peter, for the last time. comparing yourself to everybody else.

I've got a plan for him too but you're never going to know it,

because, as Aslan says in Narnia, I never tell you the other person's story.

I only tell you your own. You don't know anything about their life.

What they have gone through and suffered. What's fair.

What is that to you? You follow me. Do that. Follow Jesus.

And he will respond to your failure with grace and empower you
be a person of warmth and love.