

Easter 3C (4/10/2016)
Acts 9:1-20
Psalm 30
Revelation 5:11-14
John 21:1-19

Your server at Sunday brunch is Christ. And, feeding us with the love of God, he calls us to feed others.

Sunday brunch is a movement. There are throngs of people who don't go to church, but instead meet with family or friends on Sunday morning for a meal out. As much as I wish more of them found a home in a congregation somewhere, I can't say I blame the Sunday brunch crowd. In the milder seasons, you get to sit outside. Fresh coffee arrives at your table like magic, and you get your choice of a variety of delicious menu items, which often include Eggs Benedict as well as any number of creative spin-offs. The atmosphere is come-as-you-are, and no one arrives with an agenda or rushes off too quickly. It's the perfect environment for fostering relationships, and everyone leaves feeling satisfied.

Sunday brunch reminds me a little of our Gospel story from John today. All except for the coffee and the menu choices, I suppose. After the risen Christ's appearances to them, the disciples retreat into a familiar activity, which is somewhat surprising. Given all they'd seen, you might think that fishing would no longer be a priority. But, they're on emotional overload following the events of the crucifixion and resurrection, and apparently they

need a mental health day. So, Peter says, "I'm going fishing," and the other disciples jump at the chance to join him. It's an opportunity to decompress, to process the life-altering events of the previous week.

From a practical standpoint, however, it's a disappointment. All night on the Sea of Tiberius and no fish. The labor had better be meaningful in and of itself, because any hope for a successful outcome seems to have gone out the window. Then, just after dawn, a stranger appears on the shore and points the disciples to a miraculous catch. And in that moment, they recognize him: "It is the Lord!" This is the same Jesus who has always pointed them to abundant life, and so he opens their eyes once again to his life-giving power. Hauling their catch ashore, the disciples see a charcoal fire burning, with fish and bread sizzling on it. "Come and have breakfast," Jesus says.

The disciples' encounter with the risen Christ is perfectly consistent with their experience of him in his lifetime. Although he's difficult to recognize at first, **he is the same servant Lord, radiating the same generosity. Resurrection life encompasses all the grace and self-giving love Jesus embodied prior to his violent death. So, his appearance to the disciples demonstrates that our sinful hostility cannot crush God's will for abundant life. Instead, in spite of our rejection, the risen Lord returns to us and feeds us breakfast on the beach.**

Which brings me back to Sunday brunch. When we enjoy Sunday brunch, we experience much of what I imagine the disciples experienced on that beach by the Sea of Tiberius – good food and fellowship, a stretch of carefree time, and a deep sense of satisfaction at being together.

What's easy to neglect at Sunday brunch is the hospitality of the server, the hard-working person who brings the coffee and menus and Eggs Benedict. But, through the lens of our Gospel for today, the server is none other than the Lord, the one who has set the standard for loving service in the first place. You heard it right: your server at Sunday brunch is Christ. She devotes herself to your well-being in the time it takes to enjoy your meal, and sends you back into your daily life refreshed and contented.

And, even as Christ nourishes us for daily life, he also calls us to nourish others: “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.’” It takes two more confirmations of Peter’s commitment to reverse his threefold denial on Good Friday, but Peter is sufficiently rehabilitated.¹ Just as importantly, Jesus lays the responsibility for servant leadership squarely on Peter’s shoulders. In effect, he says, “I have fed you, now go and feed others.”

¹ See Joseph A. Bessler, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol. 2, 424; see also Lewis R. Donelson, 425.

The tie that binds is love. **Jesus is the very embodiment of God's love for the world. He loves his friends to the end, laying down his life for us. And, rising from death to new life, he offers us the gift of his peace, patiently accompanies us in our doubt, and serves us a tasty bite after a long and hopeless night. It's love that animates Jesus from beginning to end, and love that he pours into our hearts through faith.**

So, put down your burden, dear church, and gather around. Take the meal the risen Christ has prepared for you. Take time to appreciate the food and the companionship, and give thanks for the hospitality of the server. And when you leave the meal, leave with a full heart for the love God has extended to you, and keep an eye out for those God calls you to feed.