



**April 22, 2007**

John 21:1-17, 19b

## “Breakfast with Jesus”

When I was ten years old, my family, consisting of my parents, my 13 year old brother and myself, began taking camping vacations. As I’ve shared with you before, my father had resisted this for many years, but one spring day my mother arrived home from Sears with four sleeping bags, air mattresses, a campstove, tent and other paraphernalia. My dad could no longer resist her enthusiasm or her determination. And he knew it was the only way we could afford real vacations. So off we went--- up into the Rockies, to the Dakotas, to western Nebraska lakes. I LOVED it. The outdoors, the fresh air, God’s wonderful touch through nature. But the best part was waking up to the smells of breakfast cooking: the smoky fire, the aroma of bacon frying, potatoes and onions sauteeing in the bacon grease. I’d crawl out of my sleeping bag, unzip the tent flap and step out into the crystal air. Surrounded by the green grass, breathing the clean pine smell, I could not repress the joy that leapt within me—joy in the new day, delicious anticipation of all that was ahead to discover and experience. And beginning it all was that mouth-watering breakfast!

As I ate my breakfast in the brisk air, I found it tasted so much better than any breakfast at home ever did. I thought of, and envied, children of other cultures and times who lived connected with nature all the time.

Whenever I read or hear our Gospel lesson for today, John’s account of the risen Christ greeting his disciples by the Sea of Galilee, I am flooded with the smells, sights and images of camping. When Jesus says, “Come and have breakfast,” I’m ready to leap out of my seat. “Ok, Jesus, here I am! Let me sit beside you here on this stone. Let’s breathe the fresh air and eat with gusto and relish!”

One of the precious gifts of the faith community that I treasure is sharing meaningful moments of food and fellowship. I love the example Jesus has given us. Read the Gospels. His was a healing and feasting ministry. His first miracle was worked at a wedding in Cana, where he feasted and rejoiced, providing new wine when the host ran out. He shared meals with his friends at Bethany: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, encouraging them to share in the conversations, stories and teachings he loved. He called to Zacchaeus, the short fellow hidden in a tree, hoping to catch a glimpse of the rabbi—saying, “Let’s go share a meal at your place.” Jesus proposed lunch to this despised, hated and feared tax collector, a collaborator with the Romans. Jesus ate and drank with all kinds, sinners and righteous religious leaders, both. He shared a meal with an intense and persistent crowd of more than five thousand people. I LOVE this about Jesus. I LOVE that this is something he did AFTER his Resurrection: share meals with his friends.

Picture this story: Here are the disciples. The risen Christ has already appeared to them twice—once asking for something to eat, and they had given him some fish. But now it seems they had put those events behind them. They weren’t sure what to do next. So they went back to what they knew—the trade of fishing. Out they went, onto the Sea of Galilee.

Commentator William Barclay explains that some of the best fishing in the Sea of Galilee is done at night. So they were out, lanterns lit, working all night long. The sun began to rise, and this fellow on the shore called out to them, “HO there! How’s fishing? Any luck?” “NO—haven’t caught any,” they replied. Then he called back, “Throw your net over to the right, quickly!” They did, and pulled in a net loaded with fish. Barclay suggests that this doesn’t necessarily describe a miraculous event—even today it is common for a partner to stand on the lakeshore with those out on the water fishing. Often a shoal of fish can be seen from shore that is not visible to those on the water.

The disciples began to think this man might be Jesus. They felt awkward; they weren’t sure what to say. But Jesus had built a little charcoal fire and was grilling fish over it, and toasting some bread.

“Come and have breakfast,” he invited them. “Get a couple extra fish from your catch, and let’s throw them on the fire.” He finished cooking and passed the food around. “Have some, come on! It’s good.” They sat with him and began to eat.

How can you help but love this guy? Here he is, God in the flesh, raised from death, victor over all that is evil and destructive. And he’s out by the lakeside, crouching over a smoky fire, loving his friends, giving them food, providing nourishment, sustenance, caring.

Friends, Christ is always with us, in times when we share Holy Communion, and seated at every table where we gather to eat. He is always offering us nourishment, for both our bodies and our spirits. He says to us, “Come and have breakfast. I made it for you.”

Our reading for today continues beyond breakfast, however. So there is more for us to learn here.

Breakfast with Jesus IS a time of receiving--- nourishment, sustenance, strength and love. But Breakfast with Jesus is also a time of being questioned by Jesus.

Jesus gives us food, and gives us love.

But then Jesus asks us, “Do you love me?”

With our stomachs full, with food smells wafting in the air, with this wonderful person who bends again and again to the fire, handing us fresh morsels of food again and again--- it’s easy to say, “Yes, Lord, oh yes, you know I do, I love you.”

Breakfast with Jesus doesn’t stop there, however, leaving us basking in the warm glow of shared love and appreciation.

“OK,” Jesus says, “Feed my lambs.”

Aha. Loving Jesus is not something we can just express through feelings or words. It needs to be DISPLAYED in ACTION: in our living, our caring for others as Christ did. It will be our time to travel to lakeshores, to call to tired and weary working people, to bend over charcoal, to reach out with nourishment to those in need. This nourishment will sometimes be literal and physical, other times spiritual—and often both.

Breakfast with Jesus means being asked and told this several times, just in case we didn’t get it the first time.

“Do you love me?”

“Yes, you know I love you, Lord.”

“OK. Then tend my sheep.”

“Do you love me?”

Peter was upset when Jesus asked him this a third time. Maybe we feel like he did sometimes. Perhaps we're sad Jesus doesn't really seem to believe us. Perhaps we're exasperated, annoyed. "What does it take? I SAID I do—I SAID it already plain as day, TWO TIMES!"

"Feed my sheep."

Breakfast with Jesus is a time of receiving love and care from Christ. Breakfast with Jesus is a time of being instructed to love and care for others in Christ's name. To care, and not just through empty words or sentiments, but in real, practical, tangible ways.

What's on your "to do" list this week? Cleaning out the garage? Mowing the lawn? Shopping for spring clothes? Paying bills? Have you listed "Feed Jesus' sheep" anywhere? He's expecting you to do that. Each and every week of your life. Put it on your list this week. Ask God to help you see HOW he wants you to do some sheep feeding. Don't even PRETEND that you can't do it--- There are always some hungry lambs around, and you ALWAYS have the means to care for some of them. Jesus would not ask us to do something impossible for us to accomplish.

Maybe there is someone in your life whose spirit needs friendship, or just some sincere listening. Maybe there are some folks you could actually invite over for a meal—some people you might not have thought of—people Jesus will SHOW YOU, if you begin to prayerfully listen to him. Simple things can change lives.

Breakfast with Jesus always ends the same way. The Scripture says it plainly. Does Jesus say, "It's been fun--- see you later"? Never. He always ends each meal with these words: "Come on, follow me."

Each day we feast. We are fed. We are invited. Will we follow? The decision is ours, each time we share breakfast with Jesus. Amen.

(Explain- Ben & Kathy Adams, of our missions & outreach ministries, will be at a table outside the sanctuary with signs for volunteers to bring meals to Lazarus House, our local homeless shelter, and with a basket for donations to the Northern Illinois Food Bank. Two ways to FEED JESUS' SHEEP!)