

Third Sunday of Easter, 2016
All Saints Episcopal Church, San Leandro
The Rev. Justin R. Cannon
Breakfast with Jesus

I think I've found my new favorite Bible verse: "Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.'" There's something wonderful about this encounter. Before I get into all that I'd like to remind us the background of what's going on. We've recently followed a long, dreary Lent to Easter—the Great Vigil and Easter Sunday when we celebrated with joy The Feast of the Resurrection. Now, Jesus didn't just rise from the grave, appear to his disciples and vanish off into heaven. He stuck around for forty days after the resurrection. We've seen the change in color from Lenten purple to the gold and white of Easter—colors that remind us of the Light of Christ's Presence. We've restored the sung prayers, the Alleluias, the joyful hymns, and other festive parts of the liturgy. Just as on Easter Sunday I joyfully exclaimed to you, "Christ is Risen!" this becomes the greeting of this season. Last Sunday, Jesus made himself known to the disciples in the upper room. Today's Gospel is a little different. Interestingly enough, today's Gospel account takes place by the Sea of Tiberias. I say this is interesting because that's where the Disciples journey with Jesus began—they were simple fisherman whom Jesus approached one day and said, "Come, follow me." By this time, however, Jesus has risen from the dead and the glory of God was revealed in this mighty act. But we find, the disciples are right back where they began, doing what they knew how to do, life as normal. That's kind of surprising to me. And Jesus doesn't make a big deal about that—in fact, after their great difficulty in catching fish, Jesus advises them to cast the net to the other side of the boat. Rather than rebuking them for going back to their old lives, in the pattern and work of the life they know, he reveals himself to them, a miracle of catching more fish than they could manage.

When they come to shore, with 153 fish, Jesus says to them, "Come and have breakfast." There's something really sweet about this sentence. Throughout the Scriptures the account are filled with such might and glory—the Star at Jesus' birth with wise men, the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptizer in the riven when the Holy Spirit descended like a dove, the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, Jesus' death and resurrection. There's a lot of drama and hype in the months and years leading up to the Resurrection. This story, however, is quite simple. Jesus, having breakfast on the beach with his disciples. "Come and have breakfast." Jesus imagine waking up one morning and there's Jesus, God the Son through whom we were created and have our being, and he's like, "Come on, let's have breakfast." There's actually something quite intimate in the familiarity of this encounter. As my mom once said, there's something very "domestic" about this. It's not grand and glorious, but down to earth, very human. This resurrected Jesus isn't a ghost, a phantom, but a true, in-the-flesh Jesus who is eating and presumably drinking with his friends. Considering All Saints coffee hours and potlucks, I'm pretty sure Jesus would fit in pretty well at our parish. He'd say, "Come and have breakfast" and All Saints would be all over that invitation bringing quiches, homemade hummus and soups and it would be a true feast. I know it sounds funny, but this story has a beautiful simplicity and ordinariness to it. God meeting us in the common places of life, meeting us in the commonplace of our work (for them fishing), and walking the shore with us—sand between his toes, the fringe of his robe getting slightly wet. As important as I believe it is to remember Jesus' divinity—I feel it's equally important to remember his humanity, especially after Easter when it's easy to distort Jesus into this glowing

white robed fellow who has a “spiritual body” when in fact, the body of Resurrected Jesus was one that could be touched by Thomas and enjoy breakfast at the beach with his friends.

His conversation with Peter in today’s Gospel is quite striking. Three times Jesus asks John, “Do you love me?” and three times John says, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Most simply we see a parallel in this between Peter denying Jesus three times before his death, which Jesus had previously predicted, and here Peter is redeemed in affirming his love for Jesus, three times. That’s the most surface level interpretation, but it still seems like a pretty odd encounter. As you know, I love looking at the original language of the Bible and in this verse there’s something lost in translation. In Greek, you see, there are different words for love—*eros*, *agape*, and *phileo*. These are all translated “love” but each have a difference nuance. I’ve double checked the Greek and the conversation goes something along these lines:

Jesus asked, “Do you *agape* me?”
Peter replied, “I *phileo* you.”

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Elsewhere in Scripture, *agape* is used when speaking of the “love of God” but it’s not exclusively used for “Godly love” as is often mistakenly proposed. It’s also used to speak of love of darkness, love of the praise of others, and love of this world. One Bible commentator whose works have fascinated me proposed that *agape* is a more “abstract or spiritual love” whereas *phileo* is more “palpable.” The love you have towards your child or towards a new puppy, that love is almost visible—there’s nothing theoretical or abstract about it. That we might call *phileo*.

I think Peter has learned a lesson and Jesus is sort of testing him. Peter used to be pretty bold, a little overly ambitious, naïve, and definitely willful. Peter was used to making grand abstract statements—Lord, I will never desert you! Lord, we should build tabernacles here on the mountain! Lord, I’ll follow you anywhere! His love seemed quite abstract.

It seems Jesus is inquiring if John’s love is still like that—still grand and abstract, naïve and willful, filled with adverbs like always and never—empathic and grand. Or has it matured? Jesus says, “Is that still how you love me? Do you *agape* me?” John says, “Honestly, I *phileo* you. My love is not a grand thing out there anymore, Jesus, it’s right here. Somehow you’ve made it simpler.” “Do you *agape* me?” “Jesus, I told you, my love is right here.” And finally, Jesus asks him, “John, do you *phileo* me?” John replies, “I *phileo* you” and there’s accord in the final question.

This Gospel story is not overly grand and that’s the point. God meets us in the simplicity of life, the common places. Most of the time with his disciples, Jesus was probably walking dusty roads, eating and sleeping. Most of the time with God there are no flashes of light, no water to wine, no grandiose statements of faith like Peter’s former declarations. In this gospel, sure, there’s the

catching of the 153 fish, but the rest is a simple breakfast and Peter's more toned down expression of faith, "I love you, Jesus." Not a theoretical, abstract, Whitney Houston "And I will always love you" but a simple, domestic, emotional, heart-to-heart, I love you Jesus. This is the simple love God seeks from us, in our daily life, in the small moments, day-to-day . . . love that unfolds one day at a time, in simple ways.