

When reading today's biblical story, I'm reminded of the importance of details, as there are many in John's Gospel. Speaking of details, I've never noticed that in Matthew's Gospel- at the end of Jesus' time on earth- the eleven disciples are gathered in Galilee- on "a mountain to which Jesus had directed them." In Mark's Gospel, Jesus appears to the eleven disciples as they're gathered around a table. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus meets the eleven disciples with wisdom of scripture and a message of being his witnesses. And here, in John's Gospel, Jesus meets seven of the disciples- before ascending into heaven- at the Sea of Tiberius. Today's resurrection appearance is the fourth one in John's Gospel. The first was when Mary Magdalene mistook Jesus for the gardener on Easter morning, until she recognized him when he called her name. Jesus told her to go and tell the disciples, who had locked themselves away from the rest of the world, and he appeared to them later that evening. They believed because they saw his wounds. Then Jesus came back a week later where they were again in the house with Thomas, who Jesus said could put his fingers in his side so that he could believe it was really Jesus. And then we come to this scene of breakfast on the beach when the disciples return to their old life of fishing. Before we read today's gospel lesson, let us first pray. **PRAY.** Listen to a Word from God found in the Gospel of John: 21:1-17. **READ.**

I love this story of the resurrected Jesus on the beach with his disciples before he ascends to heaven. Just like the other gospels' endings, it's a commissioning of sorts or a re-calling of the disciples. A few years ago some colleagues and I attended a conference at the beach. One morning while sitting on the sand, we read this text together for our daily devotion. We did what's called a Lectio

Divina- a divine reading- with this passage. Lectio Divina is a spiritual practice of listening for a word or phrase in a scripture passage that stands out for you and then meditating on that word or phrase- listening for God's invitation for you. I hardly play by the rules and so I had two phrases that stood out to me (and not necessarily in order). The first phrase was "When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake" (v. 7b). Do what? That doesn't make sense. So why was Peter naked on the boat? Do fishermen fish naked and if so were the others unclothed as well? And why when Simon Peter heard that Jesus was there did he immediately put on some clothes? As a former swimmer, I do know that wearing clothes in the water weighs you down/tires you out. Where have we heard about folks being naked and then clothing themselves when they hear God? That's right. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (after they had taken a bite of the apple from the forbidden tree). After they knew that they had done wrong, they wanted to hide themselves from God. Peter is the naked one in today's story. Peter- "who was known as the Rock. Peter whom Jesus astounded with a miraculous catch of fish. Peter, "a fisher of men." Peter who proclaimed Jesus the Son of God before any other disciple dared to. Peter whose mother-in-law Jesus healed. Peter who walked on water. Peter who saw Jesus transfigured on a mountaintop. Peter who promised to stay by Jesus's side even unto death. Peter whose courage failed so catastrophically around another charcoal fire on the night of Jesus's arrest" (Debie Thomas, journeywithjesus.net) when he denied his discipleship with Jesus not once but three times, as Jesus had predicted along with a rooster's crows. "One has to wonder how many times after Jesus died did Peter replay what he had done in his head, wishing beyond hope that he could just go back and erase

it? Rewrite his own past? Be the person he wished he had been? Who among us can't relate to that feeling" (Nadia Bolz Weber, *Accidental Saints*)? Yet, even if Peter wished he had done things differently, he didn't avoid Jesus, as you might think he would. No, Peter swam toward Jesus. As a matter of fact, he was in such a hurry to swim toward Jesus that he left the other disciples to do the heavy lifting of their miraculous catch. Peter moves toward the voice- moving from the weighed down margins of his own self disappointment towards the life-giving, redeeming voice of a loving, saving Lord.

The second phrase I heard in this scripture reading was at the beginning of it when Peter says to the other disciples, "I am going fishing." Notice there isn't a "let's" but an "I." "I am going fishing" isn't always an invitation to tag along. Maybe Peter needed some time alone? Maybe he wanted to go back to his roots of fishing? Maybe he just wanted to escape from the shame and humiliation of seeing Jesus again? Forget about any alone time, if that's what Peter was after because the others quickly invited themselves along for the trip. "We will go with you." For whatever reason, they wouldn't let Peter go by himself. All seven disciples went on an unsuccessful night fishing expedition together. "Time after time their nets come up empty, a perfect match for their hearts (Barbara Brown Taylor, *Gospel Medicine*). They can't go forward and they can't go back. This is their new reality. All they can do is sit together in the dark and wait for daybreak. As the morning light arrives, a voice comes from the shore, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" What? How did this person know that they didn't have any fish in their net? Not to mention that they don't seem to pick up on the "children" part. Yet, they answered the voice. Then came a simple tip/advice from the voice

about where to place the net. They could've yelled "Mind your own business," but they didn't. They listened and obeyed, and we're told that they caught so many fish that they couldn't haul it in! That's how the disciple whom Jesus loved knew it was the Lord because there was an abundance. Just as Mary Magdalene recognized the Lord when he called her name at the empty tomb, so the disciple whom Jesus loved remembered that when there is abundance, there God is and he said to Peter, "It is the Lord" (v. 7)! Again, as the other disciples hauled in their massive catch, Peter put on some clothes and swam 100 yards to shore. After all of them reached shore, Jesus, the welcoming host, asked them to bring some of the fish they had caught, and Peter ran back to the boat and hauled the net ashore, filled to the brim with 153 large fish- the net not even torn by the incredible bounty. Then Jesus invited them all to "come and have breakfast," and none of them dared to ask who Jesus was because they knew it was the Lord. We all have different ways that we recognize the risen Lord among us! For some of us it may be him calling our name while for others it may be where abundance is and for others, it may be an invitation to the table (or a charcoal fire on the beach) to break bread together and for others they may recognize the risen Lord in the love or grace shown by a friend or a complete stranger.

He came and played the piano for worship almost weekly on a college campus. While he's given me permission to tell this story, I'll call him Luke. One night, I received a call at 3 am from Luke. He was in the downtown jail in Nashville. He had been out with some friends and a few of them got some liquid courage and decided it would be a brilliant and much more efficient idea to put on roller skates to get downtown Nashville. So they skated on the sidewalk from 25th down to 2nd

Ave, while under the influence of a good bit of alcohol. While skating, Luke lost control and wiped out into a security guard of one of the clubs, knocking him to the ground. While they don't give out SUIs (Skating under the influence), Luke was in trouble, and he was afraid. He was also ashamed and embarrassed. He was arrested for assaulting the guard and for underage drinking, one day short of his 21st birthday. This was his second arrest- both involving alcohol. Knowing that they'd release him from the jail at 6 am, he used his one call to call me, his college pastor, so I invited him to stop by my office later that morning. Luke came by because he needed to acknowledge what he had done- to say it out loud- to confess his sin- afterall he was Catholic and even though I told him I wasn't a priest, he still treated me as such. Luke was disappointed in himself. I told him what he did was dumb but that didn't change God's love for him. At that moment, he said he began to feel a weight lifted off his shoulders. I asked him why, and he replied, "I need to rely more on God, and I need you guys (he was referring to our community of faith on campus)." Luke didn't say the exact words but he recognized the need to abide in his relationship with God and within his community. He knew that God wasn't finished with him yet.

Meeting people where they are- that's what Jesus does and therefore that's what we do here at Triune Mercy Center- afterall, it's God's grace, not ours. Y'all are Jesus' sheep and lambs, not mine or Pastor Tandy's. Remember- we're sheep, too- sheepdogs at best. We're all called/commissioned for Christ's mission: to be in relationship with God and with one another; to be a community of faith shaped by feeding and being fed. After Jesus feeds Peter breakfast, he asks him three times, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Despite the possible shame,

embarrassment, and guilt, Jesus invites Peter to embody- to live- what discipleship looks like- in three commands: “Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.” Jesus asks the same question of us, “Do you love me? If yes, then Jesus says: “Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.”

The love of the resurrected Lord, especially in and among the least likely people and places, is the way that God redeems even the biggest messes we make. In God’s mercy, all can be redeemed (Nadia Bolz Weber). “Peter’s shame meets Jesus’ grace, and Jesus’ grace wins. That’s the Gospel story in a nutshell. As writer and research professor Brené Brown puts it, ‘Shame cannot survive being spoken.’ Meaning, shame cannot survive the living Word. Shame cannot tolerate the resurrection. When shame encounters the God who is Love, it burns to ash and scatters” (Thomas). Amazing grace how sweet the sound...

As a community of faith shaped by feeding and being fed, I hope you all will come and join us on Sat., May 22nd, as we re-gather to break bread together for the first time in well over a year. Even though there won’t be a charcoal fire- it’ll be a gas grill- and even though it won’t be a fish fry but a hot dog fest and although it won’t be on a beach, it’ll be in our parking lot, come and eat a late breakfast or an early lunch. Because “there is always the chance, when we are eating together, that we will discover the risen Lord in our midst” (Taylor). May it be so and in the meantime let’s tend and feed Christ’s sheep together! Amen.