

# *The First Breakfast*

A Message Offered by  
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*After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.*

*Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn.*

*Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now*

*the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.*

*John 21:1-14 NRSV*

If you've been to a worship service or two you know that Jesus is with us on the mountaintops of life. Perhaps you've heard testimonies or read devotions from people who list their wedding day or the birth of a child as a time when they really felt God's presence. And many of us have been blessed to experience the comforting and encouraging presence of God in an emotional valley, perhaps when you were grieving a break-up or your child was seriously ill. But most of our lives is lived neither on exhilarating mountaintops of spiritual ecstasy nor in debilitating valleys of desperation. Most of the time we're living in between, halfway up the hillside, where life is routine and monotonous. The Bible tells us that God wants to hang out with us in the land called, "Normal," too.

What was Jesus' first miracle? Turning water into wine. That's a pretty cool thing to be able to do, especially when you're in college and out of money, but it doesn't seem to rank up there with walking on water or healing a man born blind. It's the kind of thing we'd be tempted to do to impress our friends; it's not particularly "holy." But let's look at that miracle a little more closely.

In those days wedding receptions lasted for days and *everyone* in town was invited. It was even more than a family party, it was *an historic social occasion for the whole village*. No expense was spared. This hospitality was an obligation: it was the bride's family's responsibility to entertain all the people who had shown hospitality to them on previous momentous days.

The DJ had barely announced the first dance at the reception in the tiny village of Cana when Mary tells Jesus that they're already running out of wine. In other words, the party was about to be cut about four days short. Imagine the embarrassment, the shame, and the humiliation that the Bridal party must have been beginning to feel. They were two glasses of Merlot away from being the laughing stock of the county.

So what did Jesus do? Did he say to his mother, "And what do you want me to do about a problem as trivial as this?" Yeah, pretty much. [John 2:4] But that's when the pre-existent eternal living Word of God must have

thought, “This miracle is way beneath my pay grade, but I’ve got to start somewhere. I could begin my earthly ministry with a cosmic lightshow, but I might as well begin here, preventing the most important day of two love-struck kids’ lives from becoming the most embarrassing day of their lives. So he did what must have been child’s play for the Creator of the Universe: he turned water into wine—really good wine, *Champagne* even, and lot’s of it. Jesus cared enough about their everyday feelings so he gave them what amounted to a miracle.

Some of you can remember what it was like as a kid to constantly be made fun of. Or you can remember being so embarrassed as a teen by how you looked or by your awkward voice or the last name that teachers would mispronounce every time. I can remember going into Junior High each day as if it were a battle field. And it was one, emotionally at least. The question each day was would I make it home with any shred of confidence left at all. What I didn’t know then; and what I do know now, is that even though my everyday problems weren’t the stuff of international war and peace, they totally mattered to God.

What problems are *you* facing? Are you thinking they’re so embarrassingly small that you don’t want to bother Jesus with them? If it matters to you, it matters to God; because *you* matter to God.

The whole turning point in the story was when someone had the nerve to tell Jesus that unless he stepped in soon a social disaster of epic proportions was about to occur and two young lovers would be permanently scarred as a result. Go to Jesus with *your* concern the same way that *Mary* told him about the wine shortage. Our prayers don’t have to be fancy. We don’t have to tell God *what* to do (I think God can take care of figuring that out without our help). Just let God know what the problem is and that you need his help. Make this kind of prayer a habit and you may just find that the water of your tears has become sparkling wine for toasting victories in your life.

Then there was the time that Jesus was teaching about 5000 on a hillside. He could see that they were getting hungry and distracted. If he didn’t do or say something quick he was going to lose his audience. He could have ended class early and sent the crowd away. He could have lectured them on how truly spiritual people shouldn’t care so much about

full stomachs. But he didn't do that. Instead of a sermon he gave them a snack.

He saw that they had a real need, took some bread and a couple fish, and started passing it around. And you know how the story ends: there was more than enough for everyone.

Do you remember where that food came from? John tells us that a little boy brought it with him; it was all he had. I know there are people here this morning who feel like they are down to their last two slices of bread and a can of tuna – and that's it not enough for you, much less anyone else. But in God's hands, whatever you have is enough.

If you're hungry today – spiritually or otherwise -- God is not going to leave you that way. He's not going to blame you for your hunger or say that your very real human needs for food, affection, health, and friends don't matter. God knows they do. God built those hungers into us. Take what little you have and offer it to God. Entrust it to his care. Say, "Lord, everything I have, everything I am, is yours. Do something good with it. Feed me. Feed others. Just make it enough."

Even after Jesus rose from the dead he kept performing everyday miracles: like that miraculous catch of fish we heard about in our lesson. What strikes me about that story is how, within a few days of the resurrection, Peter and his pals are back to their old routine lives. They're fishing. I'm not saying that fishing is boring. I'm just saying that it's one thing to fish for fun; quite another to do it for a living. One moment the disciples are supporting actors in "The Greatest Story Ever Told" the next moment they're back at the first century version of "Deadliest Catch." High risk; high reward; low prestige. To make things worse, they're having no luck.

They were fishing with at least two boats, close to shore, and that they had been out all night. Most likely they were using something called a trammel net. [Nun, 1989] It was actually a series of three nets with openings of alternate sizes. Fish would swim through a large opening in the first net, get caught in the small opening of the second net, and get completely snared in the large opening of the third. It takes about an hour to set and haul in such a system of nets. Then it would take more time for the fisherman to carefully remove all the fish that were tangled in the layers of netting.

That's when the net usually tore: as the fish struggled against the net with their sharp fins. On a very good night one could hope to catch between 100 and 200 pounds of fish this way.

But this night Peter and company hadn't caught a thing. That's when a stranger on shore, spotting a shoal of fish near the disciples' boats, tells Peter to cast a net on the other side. This was probably a much smaller cast net (a weighted handheld net that you threw over a school of small fish, such as sardines). So Peter grabs his cast net, throws it out, and ultimately we find out that he has quite a surprising catch: it's a net full of "large fish", 153 of them, and the net was not torn.

There are three miracles here. They are fishing in a shallow area, where you fish for sardines, but they caught "large fish" – what we would call Tilapia today. And they caught 153 of them, that's much more than a whole night's catch. And in removing those fish from that delicate cast net, designed for tiny fish with flexible fins, the net wasn't torn by the sharp fins of the Tilapia; the fishermen wouldn't have to spend the rest of the day fixing their nets. Big deal, you're thinking. A night's work, in a single catch, with no extra work to do? That's a pretty big deal if you fish for a living.

So Jesus, in his last appearance to the disciples, echoes his *first* miracle. He saves some people from embarrassment and frustration, and adds in a few surprises for good measure. And maybe what we can learn from that everyday miracle is that if you've been working long and hard for something, and feel about ready to give up, God may well have one more miracle in mind for you. Listen for his voice, even speaking through a stranger, telling you which way to turn or to give it one more try.

If we were ever going to add another sacrament, the McDonald's Filet O' Fish sandwich would be a strong candidate. Apart from the fact that it's probably not good for you, that simple combination of bread and fish (hold the tartar sauce) is a perfect reminder of what they ate at the First Breakfast after the resurrection, the one Jesus ate with his disciples on the seashore. That sandwich can remind us, too, of all the stories in the Bible when Jesus did some pretty amazing things for some pretty ordinary people with everyday concerns: a wedding reception about to be spoiled, 5000 rumbling stomachs, and fishermen who kept coming up empty.

The Last Supper speaks to us of the extraordinary lengths God will go to to keep us with him forever and, it makes us want to live with eternity in mind, as if each day were going to be our last. The story of the First Breakfast tell us that God is just as concerned with “the small stuff” of life as “the big stuff.” And it makes us want to live our lives as if each day were our first – full of wonder, joy, and hope. Amen.

For more information on fishing techniques in first-century Israel, consult Mendel Nun, *The Sea of Galilee and its Fishermen in the New Testament* (Israel, 1989).

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