

# Breakfast with Jesus

John 21:1-14

Lethbridge Mennonite Church

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As I mentioned last week, in the month of May, we are embarking on a four-week resurrection tour, paying attention to where in the gospels Jesus shows up after Easter. And, by implication, where he might be showing up in our lives today.

Last week in the story of “doubting Thomas,” we saw that the risen Christ shows up to frightened, confused disciples hiding behind locked doors, saying two things: 1) peace be with you; 2) stop doubting, and believe.

Today, we’re on to scene two. Today, the risen Christ shows up on a beach and over breakfast.

But before we get to the Sea of Galilee, I want to begin in a somewhat less-inspiring location. The McDonald’s drive thru.

This is where I found myself a while back, clutching a \$1 medium black coffee on my way to work. It was the fourth time I had done so that week.

Claire had recently begun a new job, and she and Naomi had been emptying the coffee pot on the way out the door and when I would go to fill my travel mug, it was just the dregs at the bottom of the pot.

I could have made another pot but, well, you know that would take time, and I was often running late, and McDonald’s had this \$1 coffee promotion on, so....

There I was. And I was wondering, as I exited that drive thru clutching my \$1 medium black coffee, *What have I become?*

You might think this is a rather dramatic response to an ordinary thing. You’re almost certainly right. A trip through a fast-food drive thru probably doesn’t provoke existential distress for most normal people.

What was the source of my disquiet?

Well, in my mind I am *not* the kind of person who drinks \$1 coffee from McDonald's. This is not the story I tell myself about who I am and what kind of tastes I have cultivated and what principles I adhere to.

For starters, there was a time when I would have avoided drive-thrus like the plague. They were a symbol of everything that was wrong with a convenience-addicted, gas-guzzling, over-consumptive culture that only wanted stuff that was fast and cheap and didn't care about the effect it had on the environment.

I would drive by a fast-food restaurant and glare with no small amount of disdain at the long lineups of exhaust-belching oversized vehicles waiting for their mass-produced food and drink.

Like the Pharisee praying in the temple, I would pass by and give thanks that I was not like all those wretched tax-collectors.

But then COVID happened. And drive-thrus became "safer" and thus more acceptable. Kind of? I guess? We are experts at rationalizing our behaviour after the fact, aren't we?

There was also time when I imagined myself to be something of a coffee connoisseur. I would pretend to know things about the fineness of the grind, the roaster, the preparation method, etc.

When I travelled (especially to Europe), I would visit local cafes and sip small cups (often with saucers) of strong cappuccino or espresso.

I would sigh and shake my head at the provincial backwater soil from which I regrettably sprung, with its undiscerning consumers gulping down their bathtub-sized fast-food coffees. They really need to learn how to enjoy less quantity and better quality. Such a shame, that I was cursed to wander among these Philistines.

I would return from my travels full of resolve to become a better consumer, to model better coffee behaviour to those around me, to live out the truth of who I really was.

To this day, our kitchen cupboards are littered with the evidence of my resolutions. There are various French press carafes, Italian stove-top moka pots, milk steamers for lattes, many of which are used in, shall we say, moderation?

Whatever my actual coffee making and drinking habits were, I very much liked the *idea* of not being the sort of person that just drank coffee from a boring old drip coffee maker.

**As I was driving out of the McDonald's parking lot that morning, there was a collision of stories. There was the story I *preferred*, the story I thought reflected my true self. And there was the *actual* story.**

In the former version, I am the sort of guy whose natural habitat is a European-style cafe with good, expensive strong coffee that is produced with time and care and attention to detail.

In the latter version, I am the sort of guy who is late for work and races through the drive-thru for an oversized cheap cup of a hot black beverage that marginally approximates coffee.

(To all the people here who like McDonald's coffee, I apologize. Please don't waste any time trying to convince me of the error of my ways after the service. I'm probably a hopeless cause.)

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I suspect the disciples knew a thing or two about having one idea about who they were, and having their actual behaviour tell a different story.

Peter and Thomas perhaps felt this most acutely in those early days after the events that changed the world.

Peter was the brash, bold, courageous disciple. The one who would do anything for Jesus. The one who walks courageously toward Jesus on water, who is the first to confess Jesus as the Messiah, who is the eager beaver pupil on the Mount of Transfiguration, who thinks he is impressing Jesus in a discussion about forgiveness by saying, "Up to seven times??"

It is Peter who speaks the famous words that Christians down through the ages have claimed as their own: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." It is Peter who cuts off a Roman soldier's ear in a spasm of righteous violence and an attempt to save his friend and preserve his mission.

Peter's idea of who he is comes crashing down to earth in Jesus' last days. He falls asleep in the garden of Gethsemane. And of course, he betrays Jesus three times as the end draws near, just as Jesus had predicted he would (more on this next week).

I doubt Peter would have thought of himself as a coward or a betrayer. This wouldn't have been the story he told himself about who he was. In that story, Peter would have been the devoted follower of Jesus, the devout Jew looking to play a role in his people's rescue.

Thomas's story perhaps lacks the drama of Peter's. He doesn't show up as much in the gospels, and when it does, he's often the one asking questions, pumping the brakes on everyone else's enthusiasm.

But Thomas, too, likely never imagined that he would be the disciple remembered for his failure to believe. This was probably not who he thought he was.

Nathaniel, James, and John would each have their own stories about who they *thought* they were and who the events of Holy Week had revealed them to *actually* be.

They had imagined themselves to be those in the inner circle of a coming king, Israel's Messiah, who would take over and liberate their people from Roman rule.

And then it had all gone in such an unexpected way. And they had scattered. And the tomb was empty. And Jesus was alive! But what did it all mean?

I doubt any of the disciples came out of that week and the days that followed feeling particularly great about themselves. They were disoriented, defeated, chastened, hopeful, yes, but in a much different way than before; possibly more humble, almost certainly more reflective and slower to assume that they knew the ways of God in the world.

And now, the dust is settling. The cross and the empty tomb have laid bare the sin of the world, from the power structures of religion and empire, right down to individual hearts and minds.

What do you do when everything has been upended and nothing is what you thought it was? What do you do with all the confusion and the shame and the surprise of these last days? What do you do when your actions have shown that you're not necessarily who you thought you were?

Well, you go fishing.

This is what Peter decides to do. And the rest of them just kind of tag along. Sure, let's go. Back to what we used to do. Back to what we did before this crazy three-year ride with Jesus. Back to what is familiar, back to what we know.

It all feels so anticlimactic given the story they likely imagined they were going to be a part of. James and John once imagined they'd be ruling with Jesus in his kingdom. The others likely had similar ambitions.

And now here they are, out on a fishing boat in the Sea of Galilee. Business as usual. But they had hoped for so much more than business as usual!

Well, it's a long and futile night on the water. They catch nothing. But then a figure appears on the shore. *Throw your net on the other side, you'll catch some fish.*

This must have seemed an absurd command to the disciples. *What, you think the fish are all just hiding on the other side of the boat?* But they do what he says. And they get a haul they can barely believe.

And all of a sudden, they know who this figure on the shore really is. *It is the Lord!*

Peter, as ever, is off the mark first, hurling himself into the sea and swimming to the sea. The other disciples do the more responsible thing, dragging their record catch to shore.

And this is where the story gets a bit odd. We can only imagine everything that must have been going on in the disciples' minds, all the mixed emotions, all the confusion and shock, all the questions they must have had.

We might expect a joyful, exuberant reunion full of conversation and explanation. We might expect shock and incredulity over the miracle that they had just witnessed.

But John records very little dialogue. There will be conversation—one very important one with Peter, as we'll see next week. But for now, not much.

Jesus simply tells them to bring the fish they have just caught (one hundred fifty three—interesting that someone counted!). And says, “Come, have breakfast.”

And if there was any lingering doubt that any of the disciples had about whether or not it really was Jesus, it disappears over fish and bread.

They recognize him in his actions. The one who fed multitudes with five loaves and two fish, now feeds seven of his friends on the beach by the Sea of Galilee.

The one who broke bread at the Last Supper and said, “this is my body, given for you” now sits among them offering kindness, hospitality, friendship.

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And so, what can we say about where Jesus shows up in our world from scene two?

**The risen Christ encounters us as we are**, amidst the gap between the selves we imagine we are, the selves we present to the world, and the selves that are known truly by God.

When we've come to the end of ourselves, when events in our lives have revealed unflattering truths about us, when we feel like we gotten a lot wrong about God and God's ways in the world, Jesus comes to us. Jesus takes the first step.

It strikes me again this week how easily Jesus could have shown up after the resurrection with a wagging finger. How he could have come back to his disciples with a word of rebuke for their many failures to understand, to be loyal, to be faithful.

But he doesn't. He shows up speaking peace. He shows up curious, asking questions. *Have you caught any fish?* He shows up as a friend.

**The risen Christ shows up in everyday life.** Not in temples or synagogues, but in the context of daily work; when we're out fishing. Jesus interested in the ordinary rituals and tasks of everyday life.

It's a reminder that a key component of the Christian faith is that God entered flesh and blood, ordinary, gritty, human experience. And God enters it still.

Christianity has never primarily been a religion of detached metaphysical principles and doctrines. Before anything else, it is the unshakeable conviction that God, in Christ, has come near to us. *God with us.* Emmanuel.

**The risen Christ shows up offering a different way.** The disciples had endured a long and fruitless night of labour. Their efforts had not been rewarded.

Jesus shows up and says, "Why don't you throw your net on the other side? Why don't we try a different way?"

I wonder how many of us know this feeling. How many of us have been trying the same thing for a long time, whether it's in the context of a relationship, a job, the church.

And it feels like we're just spinning our wheels. We're not catching any fish. We're not making any progress. We're tired and frustrated. And it all feels futile.

Perhaps Jesus is standing on *our* shores, saying, "Why don't you try a different way? Why don't you let me be your guide? Why don't you trust me and see what happens?"

**The risen Christ shows up for breakfast.** The Bread of Life breaks bread and offers it to his friends. And he still does. Each time we celebrate communion, we rehearse this deep truth: Jesus' friends recognize him in the breaking of bread.

Next week, we'll pick things up after breakfast where Jesus has an important conversation with Peter.

But I hope we can hear the good news from this story about breakfast with Jesus this week.

Jesus loves us as we are. Jesus is interested in the things of our everyday lives. Jesus offers a different way when we feel like we're at the end of our rope.

Jesus always takes the first step toward us. This is perhaps the best news of all.

Amen.

