

Come and Eat

Menno Mennonite Church

May 1, 2022

Purpose: To encounter the invitation to follow Christ again by way of the simple yes.

Message: No matter the chapter we have been through, Christ meets us where we are and invites us into discipleship time and again.

Scripture: John 21:1-19

Synopsis: We have a way of elevating the figures of faith well beyond their status. The saints are the ones who said the right things at the right time, saw all things before them, and made the grade well beyond the mere mortal. We elevate them both to venerate their success, yes, but perhaps also to allow ourselves the granted relief of not having to measure up to their mark.

Yet the gospels have the habit of showing them at their less than ideal, saintly best. Jesus has a way of keeping on showing up and inviting them to step into what next. Peter's experience in being invited to respond to Christ's call while unique, is not isolated to him alone. Rather than rejecting the failures of being people of faith, Jesus invites us to step up again and again by merely saying "yes".

John 21:1-19

21 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way.

² 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.

³ 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.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No."

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ When they had gone ashore,
they saw a charcoal fire there,
with fish on it, and bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.”

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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.

¹³ Jesus came and took the bread
and gave it to them,
and did the same with the fish.

¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared
to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast,
Jesus said to Simon Peter,
“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”
Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.”

¹⁶ A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”
He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.”

¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”
Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time,
“Do you love me?” And he said to him,
“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”
Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

I wonder when is the last time that you have considered your calling? I am guessing that it has been a while, if at all. For the most part we think of a calling as a particular thing—something that is part of a particular way of being a Christian, sure, and stuff for pastors and the like, but for most of us in the day to day, we may not be so sure. Sure we have the stuff that we do in the name of Christ—attend church, help out where and how we may, try to get to know our neighbors and present the love and face of Christ. All of this is a fine calling, but it is nothing that we find particularly special or extra ordinary. Especially as Mennonites with our dedication to a faith that bears ethical consequences and real life decisions, we perhaps more than the average might feel a role that we play as Christians, but we might hesitate to call it a calling. I know that I struggled with the notion of being called and having a calling. Pastoral ministry was something I was interested in sure, and had a joy in doing, but I hesitated to apply the notion of calling lest it become too serious and inescapable for me to deal with (my problem, not that of the Lord or the notion of ministry). However the more I live this life and, yes, this call, I can tell you that it is a for me a calling, and one I think is not limited to particular people and particular times. It really only has to do with saying yes. More on this later.

One of the things I love about the gospels is how so readily they depict the characters of the kingdom as they were—a bunch of fairly ordinary people who happened to live in an extraordinary context. Time and again we are privileged to see them at less than their best moments. There are no super saints here; just people trying to make it through another day after moments which they were trying to still make sense of. In the very shadow of the most unbelievable, broken week of their lives, we have the disciples going back to what they know best, what they were sure of; they go fishing. After all, what better than a little night fishing to take your mind off what troubles you. Sure, they had just encountered the risen Lord, they had come from the grave of desperation to being able to touch the very hands and feet of the rabbi who they had lost. They had spent their time together, and they were trying to figure out what all this new stuff meant. Jesus was alive, yes, they believed, sure. But they were still trying to integrate this fact into their schedules and lives to know how to live because of it. There were questions of now that we are sent where do we go, and the awkward questions of who was in and who was out. So going fishing was a sensible thing to do—it was at least soothing and familiar if nothing else. They can be there and let it all hang out. After all what happens on the boat, stays on the boat.

It is into this situation that Jesus comes to them. He comes to them in the midst of their wonderment and meets them where they are as they are. A morning visitor on the beach with some tactical fishing advice. Someone that they humor perhaps to cast on the other side of the boat. Someone who they finally and fully recognize in the shape of a generous presence, miraculous provision, and the Jesus comes to them with a simple meal, in quiet ways, through unimpressive means, and their eyes are opened to a whole new world. Jesus is alive, Jesus is present in this place where they have come in confusion, and meets them not with pronouncements of ‘peace be with you’, no I am the way the truth and the light, no great glowing lights and special effects of spectacle. Rather, he comes and appears to them in the simplest way. Now that you have some fish, let’s have some breakfast. Come eat, and know who I am. Come and sit, and rest in this holy moment. Come eat, and be filled with the presence of God.

It out of this that things get tricky. In calling Peter, the one which tradition has empowered with the job of being the heavenly bouncer to keep out the riff-raff, let alone the first essential leader of the church, there had to be a call. There has to be an interview. Most of all there has to be forgiveness—mostly of Peter forgiving himself for what has been among the worst moments of his life as he denied his Lord and his God as he was so quick to say before. There is little doubt that the 3 fold call to feed the sheep is a echo of the denials that went before. The charcoal fire that they are gathered around is described by the identical word that is used in the recounting of the denials only chapters before. This story is about more than further proof of the risen Christ. It is tying the loose ends and demonstrating that where resurrection life is fully known and realized forgiveness and restoration must always follow.

Peter was a person who was given to saying yes. He keeps doing it again and again throughout the Gospels. In his first invitation to come and follow; in the outstretched hand of the Lord inviting a stroll on the waves, on answering the question “who do you say that I am” with the bold proclamation of the truth. Time and again he says yes, and that is what makes him a disciple in the first place. And here he is doing it again. He doesn’t know what he is signing up for, what it will do or where it will take him, but he says yes, and what’s more he finds the courage to say yes again after he knows that he has failed his previous yeses in denying that he ever even knew the person inviting him into the business of feeding the sheep.

He could only do that because he found a way to accept forgiveness for all that came before. Which is no small thing. Think of that which you have done in your life that was less than ideal,

or that you would have preferred to remain hidden if at all possible. How easy was it for you to receive the invitation to stop hiding and tell the truth. I am reminded of the my childhood regularly as I live with Luke and Anna's learning how to exist in the world, realizing the many times that it wasn't so much what we do that gets us into trouble, but the stuff that we concoct to hide what we did and pretend that there is nothing wrong—that's what causes the pain. Perhaps, at the end of it all, the primary difference between Peter the denier and Judas the betrayer is that Peter was able to find a way through the other side long enough to say yes to the forgiveness that he found there.

Peter felt hurt that Jesus asked him three times, but the path of his journey with Jesus was full of this rhythm of call, response, invitation (question-answer-imperative). From that early fishing trip to the one reported in this passage, Jesus provides Peter with the option to take the journey of following Jesus into a dawning new creation. Peter doesn't become perfect although he matured over time. He grew into the responsibility he received. I suspect he benefited more from the mistakes he made than he would have from a smoother path. It allowed him to follow on, and it allowed him to keep saying yes time and again.

Peter is far from the only one. God uses the broken people who say yes time and again. The Bible is full of their reality. There would be many examples of this, but you only need think of David, I think, to find the best. Called to lead, he is a profoundly broken individual who time and again strays from the narrow path we would rather he tread. He fails, spectacularly, yet he is described as the one after God's own heart. David knows how to fight for his faith, but more so he knows how to say yes when offered a place in what God is doing then—perhaps only after having gotten egg on his face, or feeling as though the world has abandoned him—but he keeps coming back and doing the important work of reaching out for God.

Jesus asks the question regularly “do you love me?” Some translations phrase it “do you love me more than these”; more than your life, more than your inclination to hide from the past; more than the privilege to remain uninvolved and uncaring for the world around us. Peter is asked this and so are we, time and again, and even each and every day. We are called time and again to place our love of Jesus foremost in our lives, and in that calling to love and care the way Jesus did. We are faced with this question everyday.

And what's more we are invited to say yes. We are invited to say yes to joining the invitation to be the incarnation we so long to see. The call to follow God rests on the invitation to love God. Our calling does not require us to achieve a level of perfection as a prerequisite, it just asks us to

say yes to the love that we have in our hearts, and to make the love real to those around us. The only thing that is required is our willingness to say yes and to continue with life with Jesus. And we can say yes in all sorts of ways. We can say yes with full confidence and with nagging reservations. We can say yes after having doubts. We can say yes after shouting emphatically No however many times before. We can say yes without knowing the way or where it leads. We can say yes with fear and trembling, full of Joy, full of misgiving, full of uncertainty, full of grief, full of want for forgiveness, full of need for a new thing—what ever it is, we can say yes to what is next, knowing with certainty that in that yes, we will be met with the inviting grace of Christ who calls us time and again.

It is saying yes that makes the difference, and in saying yes that takes us down the road. For in saying yes, the door is opened for God to be with us, to change us, forgive us, and through us even change the world.

Friends, may we find our call, each one, and continue to say yes as we follow on with Christ who leads us on.