

Acts 9: 1 – 6 (7-20)
Rev. 5: 11 – 14
John 21: 1 – 19
3 Easter, Yr. C.

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“Simple Glory”

On the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, somewhere between Capernaum and Magdala, lies a lovely little seaside area. It has a sandy beach, it has rock outcroppings on the south side that provide some protection from storms, and there are trees nearby for firewood. It is a pleasant place to hang out. Every fisherman who worked that end of the Sea would know of it – both as a place of shelter in storms or a place of respite for a meal but also a place to sell one’s catch outside the eye of tax collectors for there is no town there – just a lovely little beach. Of course, today, it is a religious shrine and there is a small church – a chapel really – next to the beach – just up from where one would have pulled up the boats. Inside is a rock outcropping that is the center of the chapel. There is a sign there – “Mensa Christi” which I first thought meant the “Mind of Christ” – which seemed very odd. But I finally realized the sign said, “The Table of Christ” for this is the place thought to be where the BBQ at the beach took place. It really does make sense. The protected beach is lovely and safe and away from prying eyes. One could relax there, be safe there, and, maybe, sell some fish to the local residents. I am confident that Peter and the other fishermen among the followers of Jesus knew that beach well.

It is also not at all surprising that the disciples went back to Galilee. Jerusalem held nothing but fear, failure, and death for them. Like so many people when the world turned against them, they went back to a place of safety, a place where they had been happy and proud and confident. They went home again. And there is something about Galilee that is truly sweet and wonderful. It is green and lush, filled with life. It has stunning views across the Sea to the Golan Heights and down the Sea to the drier south. The Via Maris, a branch of the Great Silk Road edges along the north and west shores of the Sea as it angles toward the Mediterranean and Egypt, bringing customers, bringing news, bringing fresh ideas from exotic places. The towns are small, the pace of life is rural, but there is a true awareness of the larger world beyond the hills. I, too, would go back to Galilee. There is a palpable air of simple glory there that is both inviting and nurturing. One quickly understand why Jesus spent time there. God is very present there and it is a healing place. And so the disciples seek the former, the familiar, the safe in returning to the one place where life had been so good.

The disciples are not successful. When it was past the time to generally catch fish, the disciples meet a wise-guy who has shown up apparently to embarrass them. He does so by pointing out that they have caught nothing. But that same guy helps out by having them cast “on the other side.” And, voila, more fish than ever are waiting patiently in the net. And, so, they have breakfast, apparently prepared not by some odd stranger but, in fact, by the Risen Lord. This was the third appearance, according to John, two appearances in the locked room and this beach breakfast.

It is the conversation that ensues after breakfast that fascinates. I imagine the disciples sitting around, on the sand or sitting on boulders, having been fed, basking tentatively in the presence of

their Teacher, wondering at the amazing events, hoping for more insights, more teachings, more signs of great power and, I suspect, waiting for the angry or hurt accusations of their fecklessness. Their Lord has been so kind in the face of their abandonment of Him. No words of recrimination; only kind words of peace and calm. Perhaps there was a lull in the conversation that often happens at a dinner party when the group senses it's time to change the topic or that something serious is about to be discussed. And so it happens. The Risen Lord initiates a deeply personal conversation with Peter. The denying Peter, the one who had just led some of the followers of Jesus back to their old life of fishing – and unsuccessfully so – that Peter is asked by the Risen Lord, “Peter, do you love me?” First, asking such a question is often dangerous. Asking such a question makes the one asking terribly vulnerable and places the person being asked in a difficult position – it is not really a fair question. But this question is being asked by Peter's Lord and God – The Risen Lord.

What a question! God is asking Peter if Peter loves God. Notice that The Risen Lord does not ask Peter why Peter doesn't love him nor does the Risen Lord ask Peter why Peter denied him three times when Jesus was under arrest. One might think Peter would be wondering if the Risen Lord still loves Peter. Peter is likely afraid of asking that same question – “Lord, do you still love me – after how badly I screwed up in Jerusalem?” But that would be focusing on their old life – the life before the crucifixion and the resurrection. The Risen Lord is focused on this new life – new life for the disciples in their own resurrection, in the re-birth of their ministry without Christ Jesus as earthly leader.

And so, in a three-part ritual, Christ Jesus restores Peter, through love, to full relationship and full ministry in the Way of Christ Jesus. Each repeated question removes the previous denial. And, just so we don't miss the symbolism, this occurs on the third and final appearance as John tells the Gospel story.

For it is not enough that Christ Jesus is assured that Peter loves God and Christ Jesus. This is far more than verbal protestations of enduring love. Christ Jesus issues an imperative to Peter - “Feed, Tend, Feed.” This is about specific physical actions in this world. Christ Jesus doesn't say – “If you love me, think nice thoughts on Sundays about other people.” Christ Jesus does not say, “If you love me, avoid spending any time with sinful people but speak only to people who think like you, look like you, and act like you.” Christ Jesus does not say, “If you love me, hate people who are different from you and punish them severely.”

We, like Christ Jesus, are to feed and tend others. We are to care about others, provide for them, and feed them – both physically and spiritually. We are to offer our gifts to others for the building up the whole community. We are to tend – to cherish, to care for, and to worry about the others in our lives. We are to invite them to our table – to share food and drink with them in peace and charity. When we have been with people, sharing a meal, talking and laughing and sharing our stories, finding points of connection, finding commonalities among our differences, it is very hard to be angry and distrustful; it is hard to remain indifferent to those with whom we have been companions – those with whom we have shared bread.

It is so often the simple glories that move us and change us. Each of us has a personal Galilee – that place or time in our lives when we felt good about ourselves. But we go back so we can go

forward. It is good to break bread with friends; it is better to break bread with strangers; it is best to break bread with enemies. For in the loving acceptance that is embedded in sharing food and drink, time and talk, with others, and the restoration of going back to the familiar to re-charge, comes the ability to change our lives, change the lives of others, and through them, to change the world. It is so often the simple glories that move us and change us.

Come, the table, the Mensa Christi of our day awaits, The Risen Lord calls us to new life and to new ministry and to the making of a new world. First, we eat, but after dinner, we begin the work anew. Amen.