

West Van Baptist, April 5 (Easter Sunday!)
Dinner with Jesus – Right Here and Right Now
John 21:1-15

I. Dinner with Jesus?

It's Easter Sunday—the most important day of the year for followers of Jesus! Every year we spend several weeks building up to this weekend, preparing our hearts and minds to engage it fully. Every year we review the story of Jesus' death and resurrection and all it means. And, as a pastor, every year I find myself wondering how to tell that story from a fresh point of view, so we don't become dull to it. (We definitely wouldn't want anyone nodding off to sleep on Easter Sunday morning!)

This year we've looked at several meals Jesus and His disciples shared right before and after the events of Easter. These dinners were special times, and they've taught us some useful things. Now today we're going to think about a final meal—the very last one in the gospels. This isn't a passage we typically read on Easter Sunday. More often we talk about the empty tomb, or Jesus' first appearances to the disciples around Jerusalem. But this meal is part of the resurrection account, and I think it's a good place to finish our series as we celebrate today.

Meals can be quite revealing. Sometimes in conversation with new friends, people will ask: "If you could have dinner with a famous character from history, who would you like to meet?" It's a good way to get to know people. Maybe it's something you will do if you have new friends over for Easter dinner?

The options are endless, and the answers are good conversation-starters. Your artist friends might say "I'd like to talk about painting with Leonardo de Vinci or Michaelangelo." Someone who enjoys travel might suggest: "Christopher Columbus. What would it be like to discover a new world?" Science buffs might choose "Isaac Newton," or "Neil Armstrong or another astronaut." Maybe the answer would be "Beethoven or "Elvis" if your friend likes music. Someone might say "Tarzan," but that would just be weird.

Of course, when Christians gather, someone will always suggest "Jesus." Rightly so! Who wouldn't want to visit with Jesus; to listen to Him and just get close to Him? Though if we're really honest, judging from the Bible's accounts it could actually be risky to invite Jesus to supper. I'm sure Jesus and His disciples had many "normal" meals together. But the meals we read about almost all had surprise twists, some of which were uncomfortable or inconvenient.

For example, remember that day when 5000 extra people showed up at dinner time?! Jesus just smiled and told the disciples to feed them all, even though all they had was a boy's bag lunch. Sometimes unsavory characters came to the table: dishonest tax collectors, or one of the local prostitutes. Then—as we read 2 weeks ago—there was the evening when a guest poured perfume all over Jesus and onto the floor, smelling up the house. Or the night Jesus stripped to His underwear mid-meal and washed everyone's feet!

Jesus was famous for saying and doing unexpected things. Some of the biggest surprises happened at meals, so having Him for dinner could be risky. I can just imagine what my wife would say if 1000

extra people turned up to eat. And perfume makes both of us sneeze! Still, if we could have Jesus join us, I'm sure we would—no matter what surprises might follow.

The final “dinner with Jesus” we read about this morning wasn't interrupted by a huge crowd or a gang of criminals. It was fairly quiet. Still, I think this meal was as surprising to the disciples as any they had with their Lord. So it's worth considering this morning. Often we learn the most from the stories about Jesus that come with surprises.

II. Jesus cooks breakfast

Let's begin with a little context. This dinner comes toward the end of the Easter drama presented by the gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all spend a lot of time describing the events of Good Friday: Jesus' arrest and trial, crucifixion, and burial. Then all 4 gospels shift their focus to Easter Sunday and the weeks that follow. They tell us:

- That an angel rolled the stone door away from the tomb, terrifying the guards who were posted there.
- Then several women who followed Jesus came, saw that the tomb was empty, and ran to tell the others.
- Peter and John raced to the tomb, went in, and confirmed that it was empty.
- Then Jesus began appearing to people, at first to individuals and small groups: to Mary, to Peter, to two men on the road.
- Soon after, Jesus visited the disciples while they were all hiding in a house in Jerusalem. One of the 12, Thomas, was absent and didn't believe the story. So Jesus appeared to the group again a week later, this time convincing Thomas who was present to see Him.
- Over the next 5 weeks Jesus continued to meet groups of disciples here and there, sometimes with just a few and sometimes with large crowds. He never stayed with any of them, and eventually left them with a commission to preach and a “farewell-for-now.”

What a confusing time this must have been!

Jesus often surprised the disciples. They were surprised when He was arrested, and even more when He was convicted and executed. They were amazed to see Him alive again—even though He had predicted all this.

But the appearances after the resurrection must have been the strangest thing of all. Imagine: what would you expect to happen? You've followed this man, listened to His extraordinary claims and watched Him do amazing miracles. You've come to believe He is God's Son and Messiah, the one who will rule this world as God's righteous Kingdom. Now you see that He has defeated death itself. What would you expect Him to do next?

Personally, I would expect Jesus to walk up the main street of Jerusalem, loudly shouting to everyone: “Look folks! I'm back! Death couldn't hold me. I really am Lord, and You need to follow me.” I'd expect Him to be crowned king right there, putting the evil rulers in their place. I'd expect food to appear magically on the plate of every poor person in the kingdom; to see the desert bloom

into a garden. I'd expect the Roman invaders to surrender, or just disappear. I'd expect every sick person to jump up suddenly, fully healed. Maybe dead people would come to life. After all, God's Son and my Lord and King has come back to life.

Surprise! None of these things happen. Jesus defeats death. Who sees Him first? Not the crowds, but a few women, then a few frightened disciples. He meets them behind closed doors, or on a quiet road. When a big group does see Him it's not in the city square; it's on a hillside away from the crowds. And He doesn't take up residence in the palace. He visits, teaches and encourages, and then goes ... I don't know, somewhere....

This is not what Messiah is supposed to do when He defeats death. It's not what I would expect, and not what the disciples expected.

That's the context for this morning's story. This is another of those quiet meetings where Jesus appears to a small group in an out-of-the-way place, a few days later and even further from Jerusalem.

It's an unexpected event. It's a surprise, not only because Jesus appears alive, but because He appears *in such an ordinary way*. He isn't riding on the clouds, glowing in the dark and wearing a golden crown. The fishermen have gone fishing, and now Jesus shows up on shore, dressed like any other Galilean, tending a campfire.

The story does begin with a kind of miracle. The fishermen's nets are empty. At Jesus direction they drop them on the other side of the boat, and suddenly they are full to overflowing with fish! Maybe this qualifies as a miracle. But it's certainly not the most spectacular thing Jesus has ever done (and not the first time either—see Luke 5:1-7). It is just enough to get the disciples' attention.

Then what? Does Jesus walk on the water, out to meet the boat? Does He miraculously turn stones to bread, or call down fire from heaven, or make Elijah and Moses appear? Does He teleport all the fish to shore.

No, none of those things. Jesus serves breakfast, and He does it the ordinary way: cooking it over a campfire. The group eat together. Jesus has a conversation with Peter. They talk about Peter's past mistakes, and about his future calling to be a pastor. They talk about what Peter loves most in life. They talk about getting old and facing difficulties. They talk about how every follower of Jesus needs to be faithful to his or her own call.

They have dinner and conversation. It's a life-changing conversation for Peter, and I'm sure for the others as well. But it certainly isn't what anyone would expect from the Son of God who has conquered death and who deserves to be the High King in God's Kingdom. It's a surprising meal, because it is so very ordinary-looking.

III. So ordinary-looking!

We don't think about this enough. The Easter story is familiar, so we tend to think: "Well *of course* it happened that way." We forget how amazing—and how confusing—the whole thing must have seemed at the time. Messiah is crucified? What?! Then Messiah rises from the dead. OK, that's more like it! So now everything will be completely different, right? Well ... yes, and no.

Yes, there will be powerful differences. In a few days these disciples will see God's Spirit poured out on His people in a new way: changing their hearts, equipping them with gifts, making them aware of His presence like never before. They will see amazing miracles. They will watch the message of Jesus spread far and wide, to new places and new peoples. Their own lives will change in ways that can only be described as a kind of new birth.

But *no*, everything is *not* completely different. At least, not yet. Food doesn't miraculously appear; someone still has to cook it. To buy that food, people still need to go fishing, or to farm, or to make pots and sew clothes and sell goods in the market. People will still make mistakes, and sometimes even in the church they will treat each other badly. People will still grow old. Some will get sick, and not everyone will be instantly healed. There will still be drought, and floods, and enemies, and persecution, and death.

The King has defeated death, and His disciples are beginning to taste the new life of His Kingdom. But this is just a beginning. For the most part the changes happen on the inside, in their hearts. Much of the outside world is still very ordinary-looking. So the disciples go fishing, and Jesus offers them breakfast around the campfire on the beach.

It's good for us to notice this about the Easter story, because we wrestle with the same tensions today. We're not so very different from those first disciples. Jesus' resurrection touches us—it changes us—too. We can share stories of how our lives have been transformed, of prayers God has answered, of amazing things He has done. But we also live with a lot of "ordinary" stuff each week. We have to cook dinner—it doesn't just materialize for us (unless we buy it all through DoorDash). We "go fishing"—we have to work to pay for those groceries or that DoorDash delivery. We go to school. We buy insurance for our cars. We do spring cleaning. We raise kids and babysit grandkids. We walk the dog.

We come to church and celebrate Easter. "He is risen! He is risen indeed!" We praise our Savior for dying for us, we celebrate His victory over the grave, we give thanks for the new life He gives us ... and then we go home and cook lunch and walk the dog. Tomorrow we go for a hike. Tuesday it's back to work. So ordinary-looking!

I love this morning's story of Jesus having breakfast with the disciples because it reminds me that the life-giving, world-transforming power of Easter goes hand-in-hand with ordinary living. I might think, at first glance, that Easter should turn every desert into a garden, put calorie-free pizza on every table, and rain pennies from heaven in a world where no one grows old. Once again, Jesus surprises me by doing things very differently from what I would have expected. Instead of riding a chariot up main street with a golden crown, He comes and goes quietly. He quietly transforms people, families, and communities from the inside. And He does it in the middle of ordinary life.

Jesus promised that one day this will change. But for now it's how He prefers to work. And it means that the life-transforming power of Easter will be with me this week, whether I'm praying, or writing emails at my desk, or hiking in the woods, or cooking dinner, or driving in traffic. Jesus meets me—He meets us—like He met Peter and the others on that beach: helping with work, providing for life's necessities like breakfast, talking with us about the past and the future, walking with us in the ordinary things.

IV. So what?

So let me suggest 2 practical take-aways from this story about an Easter breakfast with Jesus.

(1) The first is for those who are followers of Jesus

This is for all of us who consider ourselves Christians. A central part of being a Christian is being able to say those words: “He is risen; He is risen indeed.” We don’t understand how it’s possible that Jesus could rise from the dead. We can’t perfectly explain what it means to call Him the Son of God. But we’re persuaded that these things are true: that Jesus really is unique, that He has made forgiveness and life available to us, and that He did not stay put in that tomb.

Can I urge us to remember that we don’t just believe Jesus rose from the dead “back then sometime,” long ago and far away. We also believe that He is still alive today, and that He is present with us, right here and right now. Not in a physical sense, obviously. If He decided to show up today like He did in those early days, this morning’s service would look very different. But we do believe—again, in a way we can feel but can’t fully explain—that He is present because God’s Holy Spirit is present here among us and in us.

This is really important. In life we’re often tempted to lock Jesus up in the past. Even when we say “He is risen,” we sometimes picture Him as rising long ago, but not being alive and with us right now. Just living in history, like Beethoven or Christopher Columbus.

Or maybe we think of Him as locked up in some special religious place. He’s present here at church, but we leave Him behind when we get in the car and drive away. Or He’s present when we have a special religious experience, at a prayer meeting or in a dream, but not when we’re at the grocery store.

Because Jesus is risen, and because His Spirit is able to be everywhere, He is able to be part of your every-day, ordinary life. And He wants to be included in your every-day, ordinary life. At church. At the Bible study. At the grocery store. At breakfast, and at dinner after a long day of work. He wants to walk with you, to commune with you, to fill and transform your life right here and right now.

Let Him. Ask Him to fill all those ordinary moments of life. Expect Him to. Watch for it. Let Him bring Easter to life for you every day, all the time.

(2) The second take-away is for those who aren’t following Jesus right now

I don’t know everyone who comes to church on an Easter Sunday morning, or who watches our livestream or YouTube video. I certainly don’t know anyone’s heart and mind. But I assume that in any given week I may be speaking to some folks who are interested in Jesus but not sure yet what to do with Him, or maybe just present with friends or family. That’s fine—everyone is welcome! This second observation is for you, if you’ll let me offer it.

Many people are comfortable with Jesus the wise teacher and good example, but they struggle with the idea that He was the Son of God or that He actually rose from the dead. For a lot of people these things are hard to believe, at least in part because so much of life is just so ordinary. Food doesn’t miraculously appear on the plates of poor and hungry people. Deserts don’t just turn to

gardens. Pennies don't fall from the sky, and we've never seen Jesus march up main street in a glow-in-the-dark robe. Churches are full of really ordinary people who sing praises on Easter Sunday and then go to soccer practice on Monday, who don't look special at all.

Fair enough. Jesus works in subtle ways, and sometimes He knocks softly on our hearts for a while before we hear Him.

Can I suggest this? If you're finding it just a bit too hard to see Jesus as alive, risen from the dead, and present today, that's fine. Consider spending some more time in the gospels just reading the things He taught. Maybe start with the book of Matthew, and then Luke. Hear what He has to say, and consider what might happen if more people actually followed His advice. You can't invite Him to dinner. But you can get to know Him a little bit by listening to His message.

If you find that you want to explore Jesus further along the way, don't make things harder than they need to be. People often have the idea that to meet Jesus they have to go on some long pilgrimage to a far-away, hard-to-reach place. Or they have to climb a mountain to meet a guru on a ledge. Or they have to fast for 40 days or join a monastery.

That's now how Jesus prefers to work. The Jesus of the Bible loves to meet people in the ordinary places of life. He meets fishermen on the beach. He meets business people in the market. He can meet you at your home, or in your school or workplace, or maybe even right here. He's often working in our lives in ways we don't notice. You don't have to go far to find Him. You just have to ask, and to be willing to listen when He calls you to come and have fellowship together.

For all of us, the message of the Bible is unexpected, but quite clear: Jesus loves to meet people in the ordinary places of our ordinary lives. Wherever we find ourselves, right now and right here. He doesn't force Himself on us. He prefers a gentle, quiet approach. But He's never far away, and He loves to meet with us if we'll just ask and let Him answer.

That's the Jesus of Easter Sunday. May you enjoy His presence today, and all year.
After all, He is risen!