

SUNDAY, MAY 1, 2022 – TRADITIONAL

JOHN 21:1-19

FOOD WAS ON JESUS' MIND WHEN HE BROKE OUT A FISH OMELET IN GALILEE SHORTLY AFTER HIS RESURRECTION.

AT FIRST, HIS CLOSEST FRIENDS DIDN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE HIM WHEN HE STOOD ON THE BEACH JUST AFTER DAYBREAK. BUT JESUS KNEW THAT HIS DISCIPLES HAD ENDURED A FRUSTRATING NIGHT ON THE LAKE, FAILING TO CATCH EVEN A SINGLE FISH. SO HE CALLED OUT TO THEM, "CAST THE NET TO THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE BOAT, AND YOU WILL FIND SOME" (JOHN 21:6).

"YEAH, RIGHT," THEY THOUGHT. "AS IF."

BUT THEY TOOK HIS ADVICE. SUDDENLY THEIR NET WAS SO FULL OF FISH THAT THEY COULDN'T HAUL IT IN. WRESTLING THE CATCH TO SHORE, THEY DISCOVERED THAT THEY HAD SNAGGED 153 LARGE FISH.

NUTRITIOUS.

WHEN THEY GOT TO SHORE, JESUS WAS WAITING FOR THEM, HUNCHED OVER A CHARCOAL FIRE, COOKING FISH AND BREAD. "COME AND HAVE BREAKFAST," HE INVITED THEM, SCATTERING ANY DOUBT THAT HE WAS THE RESURRECTED LORD.

JESUS COULD HAVE PUT ON A SHOW, BUT HE DIDN'T. HE TOOK ANOTHER TACK. HE FED THEM.

AND THEN, HAVING A POINTED CONVERSATION WITH PETER, HE ASKED THEM TO DO THE SAME. WHEN THEY FINISH EATING, JESUS TURNS AND SAYS TO PETER, "SIMON SON OF JOHN, DO YOU LOVE ME MORE THAN THESE?" PETER SAYS TO HIM, "YES, LORD; YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU." AND JESUS SAYS TO HIM, "FEED MY LAMBS."

WITHOUT MISSING A BEAT, JESUS ASKS AGAIN IF PETER LOVES HIM, AND AFTER PETER SAYS THAT HE DOES LOVE HIM, JESUS SAYS, "TEND MY SHEEP."

THEN AGAIN, AS THOUGH THE QUESTION HAD NOT BEEN ASKED, JESUS INQUIRES ABOUT PETER'S LOVE. PETER IS HURT BY THIS PERSISTENT QUESTIONING, AND HE BLURTS OUT,

“LORD, YOU KNOW EVERYTHING; YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU.”

JESUS COMMANDS HIM, ONCE AGAIN, “FEED MY SHEEP” (VV. 15-17).

FEED MY LAMBS. TEND MY SHEEP. FEED MY SHEEP. WHAT IS JESUS DRIVING HOME IN THIS DIALOGUE WITH SIMON PETER? ON ONE LEVEL, HE IS GIVING PETER THE OPPORTUNITY TO CANCEL OUT THE THREE COWARDLY DENIALS HE MADE DURING HOLY WEEK. ALTHOUGH PETER HAD INSISTED THREE TIMES THAT HE WAS NOT A DISCIPLE OF JESUS, NOW HE AFFIRMS THREE TIMES THAT HE LOVES HIS LORD. THREE DENIALS, THREE AFFIRMATIONS. THE SLATE IS NOW WIPED CLEAN. AND JESUS REMINDS HIM WHAT HIS JOB AS A DISCIPLE MEANS. WHAT DOES A DISCIPLE DO? FEED, TEND, FEED.

FEED, TEND, FEED. THAT’S OUR MISSION STATEMENT. FEED, TEND, FEED THE FLOCK OF GOD.

CAN WE TAKE A LOOK AT EVERYTHING WE’RE DOING IN OUR CHURCHES AND SAY THAT THEY FALL WITHIN THIS MINISTRY RUBRIC THAT JESUS LAYS OUT ON THE SHORES OF THE SEA OF GALILEE?

FEEDING CHRIST’S SHEEP MEANS LOOKING OUTWARD, BEYOND THE WALLS OF OUR CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. FEEDING THE VULNERABLE LAMBS THAT JESUS HAS ENTRUSTED TO OUR CARE MEANS PUTTING TIME, ENERGY AND MONEY INTO THE CONCERNS OF THE COMMUNITY AROUND US. WHETHER THE ISSUES ARE FAMILY DISINTEGRATION, ILLITERACY, ALCOHOLISM, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OR GANG ACTIVITY, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO BE AN OUTWARD-LOOKING CONGREGATION THAT ENGAGES THE WORLD WITH A SERVANT MENTALITY.

POP CULTURE TODAY IS FULL OF EMPTY CALORIES: FILTH, VIOLENCE AND GRATUITOUS SEX THAT EXCITE THE SENSES BUT LEAVE US FEELING FAMISHED - IF NOT DOWNRIGHT SICK TO OUR STOMACHS.

THE CULTURE OF CHRIST, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS PACKED WITH NUTRITION: PURITY, PEACE, AND SACRIFICIAL LOVE THAT FILL OUR HEARTS AND NOURISH OUR BODIES, MINDS AND SPIRITS.

IT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JUNK FOOD AND HOME COOKING. CHIPS AND CANDY VERSUS BREAD AND FISH. THE LYRICS OF EMINEM, "MY WORDS ARE LIKE A DAGGER WITH A JAGGED

EDGE / THAT'LL STAB YOU IN THE HEAD," OVER AGAINST THE INVITATION OF JESUS, "COME AND HAVE BREAKFAST."

BUT THERE'S A PROBLEM.

WHAT EVEN NOMINALLY COMMITTED CHRISTIAN WOULDN'T AGREE WITH ALL OF THIS? WE AGREE. IT'S BAD, FILTHY, RAUNCHY, DESPICABLE AND SHOCKING. SO WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

YET, THE CULTURE IS NOT ALL RAW AND RAUNCHY. THERE IS CERTAINLY BAD TV, BUT THERE'S GOOD TV, TOO. MANY, IF NOT MOST, OF THE MOVIES HOLLYWOOD CHURNS OUT THESE DAYS HAVE LITTLE REDEEMING VALUE. BUT THERE ARE SOME.

THE CULTURE MERELY SETS THE TABLE. WE'RE THE ONES WHO PICK UP THE FORK AND EAT. JESUS IS CALLING US TO BE RIGHTEOUSLY INTENTIONAL ABOUT WHAT WE ARE FEEDING OURSELVES AND WHAT WE OFFER OTHERS - IN THE WORLD, IN THE CHURCH AND IN OUR FAMILIES.

IT'S EASY TO PIG OUT AT THE CULTURAL TABLE ON WORLDLY FARE. IT TASTES GOOD, AND WE NATURALLY GRAVITATE TOWARD IT.

BUT THE CALORIES ARE EMPTY.

WE'RE BORED AND GO TO THE MOVIES WITHOUT CONSIDERING THE MORAL AND SOCIAL VALUE OF WHAT WE SEE. WE PURCHASE AND THEREBY PASSIVELY PROMOTE THE CDS OF PERFORMERS WHOSE VALUES AND LIFESTYLES ARE SO ALIEN TO OURS.

WE'RE IN A HURRY, AND CAN'T TAKE THE TIME TO MONITOR WHAT OUR KIDS ARE DOING ON THE 'NET AND WHAT AND HOW MUCH THEY'RE WATCHING ON TV. SOMETIMES WE CHECK OUT THE LYRICS OF THE MUSIC THEY PURCHASE, BUT A LOT SLIPS BY.

OFTEN, WE'VE LOST SO MUCH LEVERAGE WITH OUR KIDS THAT WE REALLY BELIEVE THAT WE CAN'T "FORCE" THEM TO BE IN A SUNDAY CLASS, YOUTH GROUP OR THE LIKE IF THEY DON'T WANT TO GO. HELLO!?! AND EVEN IF WE COULD "FORCE" THEM, MANY OF US DON'T WANT TO. LIKE IT WILL CAUSE PERMANENT, IRREPARABLE HARM FOR THEM TO DROP THEIR BODIES INTO A YOUTH GROUP WHERE THEY'LL GET A REALITY CHECK FROM THE WORD.

CLEARLY, IT'S TIME TO GET BACK TO BREAD AND FISH - WHEREVER WE CAN FIND IT. IRONICALLY, THE CULTURE - NOT JUST THE CHURCH AND THE HOME - CAN BE A SOURCE OF STRONG NUTRITIONAL INTAKE. ONE NEED ONLY MENTION MUSEUMS, CONCERTS, PARK SYSTEMS, HIKING AND BIKING TRAILS, RECREATIONAL CENTERS, GOOD THEATER, GOOD MOVIES, GOOD TV NETWORKS AND RESPONSIBLE PROGRAMMING, TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE FOOD IS OUT THERE: WE JUST NEED TO DISCRIMINATE AS TO WHAT WE EAT.

JESUS INVITES US TO "COME AND DINE." IT'S POSSIBLE THAT IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE WE'VE CONSIDERED THE QUESTION OF WHAT WE'VE BEEN INGESTING.

NOW, WE MAY HAVE DISCOVERED WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR THE DYSFUNCTION IN OUR PERSONAL OR PROFESSIONAL LIVES. NOW, WE MAY HAVE A CLUE AS TO WHY A RELATIONSHIP MAY BE SHAKY. NOW, WE MAY KNOW WHY WE'RE PLAGUED WITH A SENSE OF SPIRITUAL BOREDOM.

WE HAVE SPIRITUAL INDIGESTION; A BAD CASE OF HEARTBURN.

JESUS SUGGESTS WE TRY A NEW DIET: BREAD AND FISH. THE FIRST IS A SYMBOL OF JESUS HIMSELF: "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE," HE SAID. THE SECOND IS A SYMBOL OF THE CHURCH.

THAT'S NUTRITION.

BUT JESUS COMES TO US WITH MORE THAN A DESIRE TO FILL US AND TO FEED US. HE ALSO ISSUES A CHALLENGE: "FEED MY SHEEP" (V. 17). JESUS WANTS US TO SEE OUR MISSION AS A "FEEDING" MISSION.

BEFORE WE OFFER FAITH FOOD TO OTHERS, FOOD THAT CAN AND WILL CHANGE THE WORLD, IT WOULD BE A GOOD THING IF WE WERE SPIRITUALLY FIT OURSELVES. IT'S HARD TO FEED OTHERS THE BREAD OF LIFE IF WE OURSELVES ARE STARVING.

TODAY I CHALLENGE YOU – LOOK AT WHAT YOU FILL YOURSELF WITH – IS IT IDLE GOSSIP, MINDLESS TV, INAPPROPRIATE WEBCASTS OR READING MATERIALS, OR ARE YOU FILLING YOURSELF WITH THE BREAD OF LIFE? SOLID FOOD OR EMPTY CALORIES? MIND NUMBING OR SOUL SUSTAINING? JESUS CHRIST AND HIS WORD WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU FEELING EMPTY OR HUNGRY. HIS WORD, WHEN INGESTED REGULARLY AND CAREFULLY, WILL BE THE LIFE SOURCE NEEDED TO BE THE CHANGE THIS WORLD OF OURS SO DESPERATELY NEEDS.

BON APPETIT! IN JESUS' NAME. AMEN.