

# The BBQ On The Beach

## Season of Easter

### Third Sunday

John 21:1-19

Read the Bible passage: [John 21:1-19](#), The Message; or [John 21:1-19](#), The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Click here: [George Hermanson's sermon](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this post.

The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

John gives another experience with the risen Jesus. We have just come from the upper room event with Thomas, which followed the earlier event with Peter and Mary. Now we are back to lake Galilee.

The disciples have gone back to their earlier habits of life - fishing. A small question emerges of why? Here they are - back fishing. Then a stranger on the shore yells at them - "lads, you haven't caught any fish, have you?" They respond with some frustration -no. The man yells again - "try another side."

Lets stop for a moment to experience the narrative - to play with its meaning. The old habitual way of fishing was not working. Like many of us, the habits of the past keeps us acting the same old way, even when it does not work. Then a word comes - change - try another approach. Rethink and break your old habits.

John is writing to a community that was trying to find new energy for their mission. The generative event needed to be refreshed, so he tells them this little story. I think this was a word to the early church - telling them not to fall into old ways of doing things. It was a call to be bold and explore new meanings. The Message is, try a new way.

The narrative moves on. In the moment of creating a new vision they have an epiphany, a moment of ah ah, a moment of clarity. It is the call of Jesus to reach out to the world with compassion that again motivates them. They recognize in their actions a moment of resurrection - fear leaves them and they return to shore.

Of course like any good story teller John does not leave it there. They come to shore and there waiting them is a bbq. Fire burning, fish cooking, and the instructions to bring what they have to add to the bbq. A nice addition for they are reminded they are needed - God needs their contribution to Jesus' way.

Again John pushes us to a deeper reading of the narrative. It is Jesus who hosts. He says "come and eat." The very act deepens the epiphany, activates their memory. For in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the food they have a resurrection experience. In the act of hospitality they know without any doubt this is Jesus. It is in the breaking of bread that they hear again the words that they are to feed the world because they are fed.

Again a double act - the activity of God's grace and the need of God for us to add to this grace. Redemption is a reality and it is recognized, thus energized they continue their vocation of living the way of Jesus.

In case we have missed it, John completes the story by drawing us back to the crucifixion. It was not the end of the mission but the beginning. For three times Jesus asks Peter a question of whether Peter loved Jesus. Three times - a sacred number - three times the denial. Here the old habits of fear are destroyed, a new habit of the heart is created in Peter and in all of us. It is the habit of hospitality. It is to see the kingdom of God embedded in our world, and to witness to love that keeps breaking into our reality. To nurture the hope of compassion and justice in our reality, to share our bread just as the bread was shared in that BBQ.

Fed and restored by the bread of life, the mission is taken up. "Feed my sheep" is the commission found in the other gospels. Now is the time to do it, even if it will cost the disciples. We read this in because this commission is given to Peter and this is written after Peter too died for his faith. The message is for us to follow.

I love this story for it reminds us that to follow Jesus' way is to become aware. It is to attend to the events around us, to sniff out the signs of hope within our experience.

We live in a world that seeks to amuse us to death. Much of the information we get is hyped up, sensationalized and surface examination of the events of our time. It is hard to get in depth analysis.

The latest tragedy is packaged in visuals and endless superficial explanations. What happens is our sense of fear and unease are increased. Or we duck our heads and refuse to look. Explanations are offered as if there was a silver bullet that would solve the randomness of our experience. "They should have closed down the university" is said without any sense that the context is bigger than most towns or villages. What is offered is a false sense of security, as if one could apply habits that work in a small context to a larger one. Rather than probing with sober second thoughts, and more reasoned examination, we get quick solutions that set us up to despair when things go wrong again.

There was an article in the Citizen on Sunday. It was a look at Joshua Bell, one of the best musician on earth, as he played in the Washington subway. There he was, like some busker, with passion, playing some of the most moving music heard. The question was raised - what would be the response? Would they hear the beauty and stop and listen? What was revealed is summed up in this poem by W.H. Davies : What is this life if, full of care/ We have no time to stand and stare. "Kant argues that one's ability to appreciate beauty is related to one's ability to make moral judgements." There is a reality called beauty and when we appreciate it we will become more moral.

The problem is life conspires to repress beauty. It does so by the reductionist idea that what is real is only that which can touch with our five senses - show me the money perspective of modern skepticism. It is repressed by the unwillingness to form aesthetic judgments, saying only that is beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The judgement of the quality has been reduced to personal feelings - if it works for you it must be ok and we refuse to make judgements on quality.

It is hard to form opinions that encourage beauty and quality. For often we substituted a tradition or a tribal understanding as a means to judge. We don't question the taken for granted standards thus become reactionary and moralistic. In the face of reactionaries, we become so liberal that our brains fall out. So the pressing issue is to find a way understand beauty, not as some fixed reality, but as a growing reality. Beauty is calling us into deeper relationships, into acts of hospitality where all the difference or diversities of our world

are invited to our table of inclusion. It is to find the ability to sort through experience to find beauty that creates a human community.

One of the learning's that came out of the Joshua Bell experiment is that we are too busy to take time to listen to beauty. One of the most striking and ironic images was the man with his own sound track in his eyes and the song was: "failing to see the beauty of what's plainly in front of your eyes." Another was that children still had the naiveté to hear the beauty. Two of the people who took time spoke of a transcendent experience - "it was a treat." "I don't really want to leave." described some of their encounter with beauty - they stopped their habitual way of living and jumped into the moment - so to speak put their nets on the other side. To move again to post critical naiveté.

A spiritual discipline helps us create a sense of attentiveness. In a book "The Life of Meaning" Bole said the religious people were good noticers. They have an attentiveness to beauty and a willingness to take the road less taken. "Anne Lamott makes the point that just paying attention is about as spiritual as you can get. Anything that brings into the now, the present moment, is a gift. "Thich Nhat Hanh speaks of being mindful of everyday things like walking and breathing."

Like the disciples we are called to be mindful of the needs of our world, to be mindful of the beauty around us, and to feel the world in its beauty. Having been mindful, experienced the hospitality of God we now go out to offer that same hospitality to all whom we meet. By beginning in mindfulness we change into the habit of caring for the world. We live our faith.

George Hermanson

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[www.georgehermanson.com](http://www.georgehermanson.com)