

Camping and Cookouts
John 21: 1-19
Take time for relationships

This is our fifth and final week with our sermon series, “Gospel Tips for Summer Fun.” We’ve told some stories of Jesus doing summer-like things and then listened for guidance that relates to those activities and more.

In week one, Jesus was out on the lake with the disciples and he stilled the storm.
Gospel tip #1: in the storm, place your trust in love.

In week two, Jesus was on a road trip with the disciples, asking them what they are really looking for. The gospel tip was “Keep your eyes open on the road, you never know when you will meet the holy.”

In week three, Jesus was a rather rude guest at a banquet, and the gospel tip was: Don’t worry about status, draw the circle wide.

Last week, Jesus was telling stories about planting seeds and the Realm of God.
Gospel tip: Just plant the seeds and trust in grace.

This week, the focus is camping and cookouts as Jesus prepares a breakfast over the fire for the disciples. Some of you have told me you are expecting new recipes. I may disappoint. As a seminary professor of mine would say, “I’m going to say things we already know, but need to hear again.”

To understand today’s story, and to start feeling some of Peter’s feelings as he dives into the sea, we have to know and remember all that has come before. Today’s story comes just after resurrection, crucifixion, and betrayal.

After Jesus has washed the disciples feet and predicted that one of disciples would betray him, Peter and Jesus are talking. Peter asks Jesus, “where are you going?” Jesus says, “where I am going you cannot follow.” Peter says, “I’ll lay down my life for you.” Jesus tells Peter, “before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” But then as the pressures of the night unfold, and Peter is confronted about being one of the disciples of Jesus, Peter forcefully denies it three times.

After saying so boldly that he will risk his life for Jesus, when he is challenged and in danger, he saves himself. He also betrays his friend.

At that point, Peter's story stops. Jesus is mocked, beaten and crucified, and then on the third day, Jesus is raised.

Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb, finds the stone is rolled away, and goes to tell Peter and John, and they race to the tomb and Peter walks into the tomb when he gets there. Jesus appears to the disciples, and has a conversation with Thomas about doubt, but we don't hear from Peter. The story with Peter is unresolved until we get chapter 21.

Scholar Walter Brueggemann has said that, "the ancients believed relationship with God was repaired through through gift and meal." This statement explains so much. This is how we repair relationship, through gift and hospitality and time for relationship. So, the thinking goes, why wouldn't relationship with God be repaired in the same way. At the heart of our faith are acts of generosity, hospitality, service, and we practice it all at the table. But the center of it all is relationship.

At the end of the gospel of John, we still have this tension, this hurt that hasn't been resolved. Peter doesn't have a chance to try to repair the relationship. He doesn't have a chance to give a gift or make a meal.

So, the Risen Christ approaches Peter instead. This is the turn our faith makes. God is always reaching out with gift, that God is always reaching out with grace. God is always giving gifts that are unearned to repair relationship.

The disciples have gone fishing. It's night. Their hearts aren't in it. They don't catch anything. Just after daybreak Jesus appears on the beach and tells them to fish on the other side of the boat. They do and they catch fish and then Peter knows it's Jesus.

Peter's fishing naked. We're not going to judge, but notice that Peter puts his clothes on to jump into the sea to swim to shore. This is the opposite of what you would normally do. Peter is so excited that he is flustered. He isn't thinking straight.

Peter swims to shore. The disciples bring the boat right alongside him. You don't get the sense from the story that Peter saved any time. He just got wet. But he shows enthusiasm!

Jesus has a charcoal fire prepared and some bread. It's a cookout. He's taken time to prepare. He has time to stay and eat and talk and be together. But more. A few fish are added for a meal. This is another loaves and fishes story which mimics communion. Sure enough, Jesus even acts out the communion meal. He takes bread and gives it to them. He takes fish and gives it to them.

Jesus has come to repair relationship. He brings to mind our sacramental practice at the table that repairs relationship between God and human beings and then turns us towards one another to repair relationship.

When Jesus and Peter talk after the meal, Jesus tells Peter to turn the grace he has received outward. "Do you love me? Then feed my sheep. Care for the church. Care for people. Share this grace with people."

In this story, Peter is healed.

It's a good breakfast.

I ran across this poem that writer Bill Loader wrote about this story. I love how he recreates Peter's feelings.

The blame forgotten,
shame covered,
Peter leapt into the sea.
Where tears once drowned hope
and denials became despair and self loathing,
now eyes had seen that figure on the shore,
that body once strung across the stained wood of execution.

A revived fishing business,
the dull depression of remembered cowardice,

of failed courage,
bad dreams of abandonment,
a deep sea of pain,
now splashed with new hope.

Peter would make it to the shore.

He is risen.
Peter is risen from the dead.
Three times denied.
Three times invited to love again
by him who three times prayed his own despair
and, three times mocked 'mid three crosses,
in three days rose to resurrect Peter.

Peter made it to the shore.

**Others made it to the shore.
They ate together,
a fellowship of grace and rehabilitation,
of forgiveness and hope,
a symbol of the persistence of divine love,
also for you and me.**

Gospel tip for summer fun #5 is : Take time for relationship. It's healing.

When I was 16 years old, my favorite person in the whole world was my cousin Lon. I'm the youngest of the cousins on my dad's side of the family. Lon is the next youngest cousin though he's 10 years older than me. Lon was always my hero, always the cousin I was drawn to. At that time in my life I was having trouble finding my social circle and Lon lived a half an hour away, so I'd drive over to see him a lot. He raced motorcycles as a hobby so his girlfriend and I would serve as his pit crew.

Lon was always generous with the time he gave me. I think he knew I was having a hard time fitting in. He'd come to my baseball games once in a while. At the end of the baseball season he invited me to go camp at a music festival with him. My last game ended. I

got cleaned up and hopped in the car and Lon drove us to Willmar, MN which seemed like the edge of the earth. Lon is a good Baptist, so this was a Christian music festival.

We camped. We ate more hot dogs and burgers than I had ever eaten before. We stood outside in the sun and the rain and listened to music for a few days.

What I remember about that trip was feeling good that my cousin wanted to spend time with me. At a time in my life when I was struggling to find my people and I didn't feel that good about myself, I had this person who cared about me, coming forward to say, "hey let's spend time together."

There was grace coming towards me. Offering gifts that I needed. Gifts that were healing.

I imagine Peter feeling good that Jesus wants to spend time with him, at a time when Peter isn't feeling good about himself. I read Peter's eagerness to jump into the lake as a sign of how much it means to him to have Jesus reaching out to him.

Last summer at my parent's 50th wedding anniversary celebration, I had a chance to talk with Lon for the first time in years. I felt gift and grace coming at me again as I remembered how much I looked up to him and how much the time he spent with me mattered to me. It was another meal where there was time for relationship, and maybe those wounds from that time in my life healed just a little more.

As summer unfolds, I'm moved by the stories of the camping trips, cookouts, and block parties that are happening everywhere. Whatever it is, this time for relationship is what we need. We need to reach out to one another to build relationship. We need to reach out to one another to sustain relationship, and we need to reach out to reconcile. There's healing grace moving through us as we do.

May love and healing grace reach out in all directions as we take time for relationship.

Amen.