

SHORE LUNCH WITH JESUS

John 21:1-14; David Shelstad Funeral; February 9, 2019

David in his retirement liked to go fishing. In fact, members of St. Paul Lutheran recognized him as someone they would often see – at least when the weather was halfway decent – down by the lake fishing. Being a quiet man, I never heard him brag about the fish he caught; never did I hear him complain about the fish not biting, or complain about anything else for that matter. I can imagine David saying to Laurita on nice days, “I’m going fishing.”

In the forty days between Jesus’ rising from the dead in Jerusalem, showing Himself alive to His disciples, and ascending into heaven, His disciples had gone back to Galilee where Jesus had promised that they would see Him again (Mt 28:10). Our Gospel Reading for today takes place in those days after Jesus rose from the dead and His disciples were in Galilee by the lake called Tiberias or Galilee.

While the disciples were waiting to see Jesus alive again, Simon Peter, who was a professional fisherman, told the others waiting with him, **“I’m going fishing.”** What do you think David would have said if he had been with them that day by the lake? Do you think he would have said with the rest of the disciples there, **“We’ll go with you”**? I think so. They had a professional fishing guide with them. Certainly that would guarantee catching lots of fish. **They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.** That must have been disappointing.

You have experienced lately a lot worse losses and disappointments than not catching fish. Instead of David and Laurita celebrating their 46th wedding anniversary, two days before we were in Jasper for Laurita’s funeral. David seemed to walk around in a daze ever since. We saw him every week in church after that, but he seemed even quieter to me. Then came his sudden collapse, brain injury and no hope for recovery, and his family gathering to make decisions about death. All of that makes a failure to catch fish seem trivial.

The account of Jesus’ disciples going fishing seems trivial. Why include it in the Gospel after the earth-shaking events of Jesus’ death and resurrection?

Jesus stood on the shore as day was breaking, asked the disciples about their fishing, and suggested that they throw the net over the right side of the boat to catch fish. They did, and the net was so full of fish that they couldn't haul it in. This led **“the disciple whom Jesus loved,”** that is, the apostle John and author of the Gospel, to recognize Jesus and say to Peter, **“It is the Lord!”** Peter then jumped in the water to swim to shore while the rest of the disciples dragged the net full of fish to the shore.

This miraculous catch of fish must have reminded John of the time before they became Jesus' disciples, when, after they had fished all night and caught nothing, and Jesus told them to go fishing in that same lake. They caught so many fish then that it took two fishing boats to hold all the fish, and the boats were so full they were almost sinking (Lk 5:1-11). (That account happens to be our Gospel Reading this weekend.) Following that miracle, Peter, James, and John left their boats and followed Jesus as His disciples, and would become apostles and witnesses of His resurrection.

In our account from John 21, the disciples found Jesus on shore with a shore lunch – really breakfast – of fish and bread for them. This reminds us of the time that Jesus fed 5,000 men plus women and children by blessing and breaking five loaves of barley bread and two fish, and giving that to the disciples to hand out to the crowd. And when everyone had enough to eat, they gathered 12 basket of bread left over. Jesus did a similar thing with His disciples the night He was betrayed. He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, **“Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you.”** And of the cup of wine, **“Drink of it, all of you. This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”**

Throughout his life, David was not always the most faithful church member. I think there were personal struggles that often kept him away from church. After Laurita died, people came to me with the concern that we might never see David in church again. I am happy to say that did not turn out not to be case. One of the reasons was that concerned members and friends encouraged him and brought him along to church with them. He felt lost without Laurita, but his church friends would not let him become a lost sheep of the Good Shepherd.

I don't know what most of you think about church membership and going to church, but David's example can be a witness to all of you of the blessings of active church membership. Not only does God show His love to His children here through the Word of Jesus, His Son, that strengthens and encourages us in our faith and life, and the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper that forgives our sins and promises us eternal life, but God gives us brothers and sisters in Christ to love and care for us here, people we can rely on when we need help, people we can help when they are in need.

David never had to sit by himself in church after Laurita died. David did not have to come to the Communion rail by himself, but came with his brothers and sisters in Christ to be fed with Bread from heaven and the Wine of the heavenly banquet that has no end. David came to church in the light of Easter and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Every time a Christian comes to eat and drink Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper, it's like being on the shore by the lake, having a shore lunch – or breakfast – served by Jesus Himself. If you don't have that in your lives now, you don't know what you are missing.

When David's daughters got to the hospital a week ago Friday, they got a report from the ICU doctor about where things were medically with him. There was no good news to be heard. When asked what happened to cause his collapse, there were no definite answers. One of his daughters later suggested that David died of a broken heart because of the death of his beloved wife, Laurita. That very well could be the answer. It's better than any medical answer I've heard so far.

We are here today in church because we know what is in God's heart: His love for us. He showed what sort of love that is by sending His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer and die on the cross to forgive our sins and save us from death. Jesus died and rose again to bring us from death to life to be with Him forever. David and Laurita are now together with Jesus in heaven. Those with faith in Jesus look forward to joining them. And with hope we look forward to the Day when Jesus will return in glory to raise us from the dead to live forever in glorious bodies like His. Amen.