



# Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

## **“Best Breakfast Ever”**

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*“When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. . . Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast’” (Jn 21:9,12).*

**April 14, 2013**

### **Collect of the Day**

O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.  
Amen

Isn't it amazing how aromas can trigger memories? Not too long ago, I put a chicken in the oven. I went outside to do some work and when I came back in the aroma of baked chicken took me right back to Grandma and Grandpa's farm, and the dining room where grandma often served baked chicken on Sunday afternoons.

Similarly, there's an Italian grocery store in St. Louis called Viviano & Sons. It's small but stuffed with homemade pastas and a large selection of imported oils and vinegars and these open tubs of various olives and mushrooms and cheeses marinating in their juices. The store has a rich and complex aroma all its own. My dad loved the place. Whenever they came for a visit we had to go, and they came for a lot of visits. I was back in St. Louis a couple of weeks ago with Stephanie, and when I swung open the door to Viviano & Sons, and took in that aroma, guess who it made us think of!

I wonder if the same thing happened with Peter and the unique odor of burning coals.

You recall shortly before his death, once again Jesus alluded to his impending arrest and execution. With much bravado Peter declared, "Lord, I will lay down my life for you." Jesus replied, "Before the rooster crows you will disown me three times."

And that's the way it was, of course – Peter waited in the high priest's courtyard while inside, the ghastly interrogation took place. It was cold. A number of people, including Peter, gravitated toward a fire of burning coals. In the light of the fire, a girl thought she

recognized Peter. “You’re not one of his disciples, are you?” Peter said he wasn’t. A little while later, someone else asked Peter the same question, and again, he denied being a disciple of Jesus.

You can picture Peter there, can’t you, with his hands out over the fire, and the others shifting left or right to keep the smoke out of the eyes. And some of that smoke curls around and into the nostrils of Peter and the brain makes a subtle, unconscious connection between acrid smoke and his denial of Jesus.

Then, once again, Peter is recognized. “You! You were with him, weren’t you? I remember you from your Galilean accent. I saw you there with him.” Desperate, Peter swears up and down that he had nothing to do with Jesus and didn’t know what on God’s green earth they’re talking about. That’s when the old rooster squawks, and Peter remembers Jesus’ words, and he goes out and weeps bitter tears. I can’t help but wonder if, for the rest of his days, the acerbic odor of burning coals triggered in Peter’s mind the painful memory of his denial of Christ. Some memories are like that. They haunt us. We tamp them down, but something pulls them up to the surface . . . maybe a smell, a song, a sight . . . and we feel the pain and the guilt all over again.

Fast forward to that Sunday morning early after Friday. Three women come to the tomb and are surprised to see the stone has been rolled away. Stooping to look in, they are startled by the presence of a young man in white robes who tells them, “He is not here. He is risen. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘Jesus is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’” (Mark 16:6ff). Notice the special attention

given Peter who is dying of guilt. He really needs to know that Jesus is risen.

In our text today we find the disciples dutifully waiting for him in Galilee, but they're getting impatient. Days go by, and the disciples aren't sure what to do. Peter is getting cabin fever. You know the type. He has to move. He has to do something. He has to get busy or he'll go mad and drive everyone else crazy as well. Finally, he stands up and announces, "I'm going fishing!" (v. 3). The King James Version says, "I go a fishing." The others join in.

The ancients liked to fish the Sea of Galilee at night time. And so by the light of a lone lamp on a pole out in front of the boat, they've been throwing their nets out all night, and pulling them back in, and have nothing to show for it.

In the early morning hours Jesus appears on the shoreline, but it's mostly dark and the disciples are about a hundred yards away from the shore. They don't recognize him. Jesus has to shout to be heard. "Children, do you have any fish?" I think Jesus is enjoying the moment, savoring it, teasing them a little. The disciples, not knowing it is Jesus, answer with a curt and annoyed "no".

I don't know much about fishing, but I do know that if professional fishermen have been working at it all night, throwing their nets out, moving the boat, trying different parts of the lake, arms aching . . . if they've been working it all night without success, they're probably not much in the mood to hear advice from some Jonny-come-lately who's out for an early morning stroll on the beach. But that's what the man on the shore says. "Throw your net out over the right side of the boat" he shouts.

Back in the boat, surely the temptation was to say “buzz off.” But they don’t. Maybe the man’s words triggered a déjà vu because months before, they had heard the same words from the same voice, with incredible results. Who can say whether it’s a déjà vu or something else, but in any case, they throw the nets out once again, and this time, there’s a whole school of fish. I love the way Pastor Thomas Zehnder said it. These fish were “called into action by the voice of their Creator as he said to them in Fish Language, “Boys and Girls, Men and Women, this is the reason you’ve been hatched. You see I have these humans up there who don’t obey me as well as you, and we need to help them understand that I still have a mission for them . . . So hop in the nets now like good fish. Here it comes, the net, so hop in.’ And they do with fish smiles on their faces.”

Up above, the disciples are stunned to feel the sudden heft and weight of their net. John puts two and two together. “It’s the Lord!” he declares. Peter, impulsive, impetuous Peter, climbs up on the gunwale of the boat and jumps overboard leaving the others rocking precariously. But Peter *needs* to see Jesus. With all those robes, progress is slow in the water. Can you see him out there, barely keeping his head above, swimming for shore. Eventually his feet touch the bottom and he stops swimming and starts plowing ashore with long slow strides . . . excited, anxious too. Remember, Peter had denied any association with Jesus. How would this reunion go?

On shore Jesus has prepared a fire for his disciples and tells them to bring some of the fish they’ve just caught, the ones with the smiles on their faces. They must have been hungry following a long, unproductive night of work.

My brother Andy tells me a shore lunch is one of life’s greatest pleasures. To be on a remote lake in

Canada, and to go ashore and build a fire and put a large pan on the coals and throw in a stick of butter. Then take some filets that you caught maybe half an hour ago and dust them with a breading and carefully lay them in the crackling butter . . . there's nothing quite like it he says.

It was all that and more for the disciples! But it's not just about hunger, nor freshness. Knowing what they know, how they failed Jesus, how they slept while he wept, how they ran while he was bound, how they denied him, gave up their hope in him and their faith. Yet here he is preparing a simple, sumptuous meal for them.

There are lots of ways to say, "I forgive you." My mother used to say it by reaching up and shaking her little fist in front of my face and smiling and saying, "One of these days, pow!, right in the kisser!" But I knew I was forgiven.

There are lots of ways to say it, but this breakfast is one of the best. In the ancient world to share a meal with someone was to say all was well with them. You were at peace with them. That's why Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors because he was Friend of Sinners. That's why one of the first things the Father did for his returning prodigal was to order the preparation of a banquet. That's why the Lord instituted his Supper, so that as often as we eat and drink of it, we know with a certainty there is forgiveness and peace with our God. And that's why Isaiah describes heaven as a feast of rich things, the best of meats and the finest of wines. And that's why Jesus has prepared this simple breakfast for his disciples, to tell them all is well. They are forgiven.

The disciples would remember it for the rest of their lives. They would never forget it. The Lord is at peace with them, and he has work for them to do.

Finally, in the New Testament, the Greek for

“charcoal fire” comes up twice. The first time was out there in the courtyard, Peter warming himself over the fire and swearing up and down he didn’t know Jesus. The only other time is here, on the shoreline. Peter and the other disciples are there. The risen Lord is there too, eating again with sinners, befriending them, forgiving them.

I can’t help but wonder if the odor of the burning charcoal reminded Peter first of his denial of Jesus and second, of the forgiveness of Jesus. Could it be that the grace of our Lord turned a foul, acrid odor into a sweet aroma?

Each of us as needs that. Each of us needs daily the reminder not just of what we have committed, but of what God has forgiven . . . not only how we went astray, but how God did find and rescue us. Not just how we failed him, denied having any thing to do with him, if not by our words, then by the way we have lived, but how God redeemed us, bought us back with his blood and made us his children. Each of us needs that. Not just how we once loved him and followed him, but how he loves us still, has high expectations of us and work for each to do. Amen.

Christ is risen!

**He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

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