

**Resurrection Practice - John 21:1-19**  
**April 10, 2016 – The Third Sunday of Easter**  
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Here's a short definition of forgiveness: "Come and have breakfast." Or maybe: "Hey, look over there; you'll catch a boatload of fish." Imagine all the things that Jesus could have said to his friends who, while he was being lynched, were last seen running away from him. Imagine what you might say to someone who betrayed you at the moment of your greatest need? "Come and have breakfast?" Maybe. Um. Probably not.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, (and mostly we don't), no one can live well if you are carrying around a burden of guilt over deeds done that can't be undone, words said that can't be unsaid. And by well, I mean with a sense of peace and purpose. Who knows this better than Peter?

The dear friend of Jesus, has become the betrayer of Jesus. Peter, the faithful one who declares he will never turn away, was last seen racing into the darkness. Peter, the one who demands Jesus wash him all over as sign of his unwavering devotion, who declares emphatically, "I don't know him!" "Hey, I don't know him." "I told you I don't know him!" That is one boat load of guilt! Imagine your closest friend, your partner, your spouse, your children – abandoning them to save your own skin. Like the few Holocaust survivors who lived because they snitched on their companions, can you imagine for a moment the magnitude of guilt?

So when Jesus appears along the shore, it is a moment fraught with ambiguity. The One who has been crucified with the complicity of all the disciples, now returns to face his closest friends each of whom abandoned him without excuse. This is high drama.

Will the victim who is now Judge of the living and the dead, condemn them as they deserve? Isn't that precisely what is due? You know, and I do, often with great pain, that a deed done cannot be undone, it can only be held accountable in some way or another. Unless, you take the more common route: to buried it so deeply that the effects leak into every other relationship.

When Peter jumps out of that boat so enthusiastically, one wonders what is passing through his mind. It's one of the funniest moments in scripture, and most poignant. He does the opposite of what most folks do. He puts on his clothes to jump in the water! Is Peter crazy with fear or drunk with amazement? I think Peter is overwhelmed by the possibility of second chance to be with the One he betrayed and loves more than ever.  
**The possibility of a second chance is yet another way of saying: you are forgiven.**

**Is there a second chance you are hoping for?**

Given the chance to condemn those who betrayed him, Jesus refuses. Instead, he offers the guilty hospitality, inviting them to be a community of the forgiven, breaking bread (and fish) with each other as a sign of their forgiven-ness and his presence among them forever.

Come and have breakfast is Jesus' invitation to let go of your sin and embrace a new relationship grounded in God's forgiving love that enables the forgiven to forgive others. This experience of forgiveness forms resurrection communities.

Some years ago I read about the members of the Babemba tribe from South Africa. When someone from the tribe has done something wrong, they place him in the center of the village square, alone and unshackled. All work ceases and all the men, women and children gather in a large circle around the accused. Then each person, one by one, speaks to him. Do you know what they say? They tell him of all the good things he has done in his life. Yes, the good things! They recall all the good words he has spoken, all the generous deeds he has performed, all the kindness he has offered. Sometimes this ceremony lasts several days. It does not end until all the tribal members have spoken every positive word that they can utter about the accused. Then, they share in a joyous celebration and welcome the accused back into the community. (Quoted in Donald McCullough, *The Wisdom of Pelicans*, p. 98)

Peter knows he has fallen further than he ever dreamed possible. Forgiveness is the only way forward. So it is for you and me who live by the forgiveness of Jesus. And with forgiveness a new beginning emerges, an opportunity to live forward the forgiveness that has been given you.

If words like love and forgiveness are to have any meaning at all, they must be practiced. Jesus recognizes this when Peter boldly proclaims (again) his undying love for his dear friend. Do you love me? Of course, I love you. Then practice this: tend my sheep. A declaration of love for Jesus – or anyone for that matter - is meaningless unless it shows up in some practice. Tend my sheep is a particular summons to Peter to care for those in his care. The summons will be different for each one who belongs to the community of the forgiven. You can be sure of this: once forgiven, your life has a deep purpose in God's continuing story of forgiveness. Because forgiveness is more than a moment in time; it's a way of life.

Do you love me? Jesus asks his friend. Of course, I love you!. Then practice that love: feed my sheep. As if to be sure no one misses the point, he asks again, do you love me? Again we reply: you know everything, and you know that we love you.

Well then, says Jesus, practice this one thing: **Follow me.**

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**In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.**