



Preparing A Meal  
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This conversation between Jesus and Peter in today's gospel reading is really remarkable. Remember that not so long ago, Peter was the disciple who let Jesus down in a big way. Peter was the friend who, in the moment when that friendship was most tested, lost courage and betrayed Jesus three times. Ever since that moment, Peter has had to walk through daily life, carrying the invisible and heavy weight of shame and guilt; shame that leads him to believe he will never be forgiven, and guilt that makes him wish so intensely that he could go back and do that moment over again.

But notice what happens here. Peter is so convinced that the rest of his life will be lived in the shadow of shame; he's already written the rest of the story, which is exactly what shame does; and yet as he brings his boat into shore, someone is there waiting for him. The risen Jesus has a campfire started already and wafts of bacon swirl through the air. I mean, is there anything more inviting than that? It's one of my favorite images in scripture – imagining Jesus whipping up a good, hearty breakfast for the friend who had hurt him, for the friend who thought he'd never be forgiven.

Jesus could have come back to earthly life with a focus on revenge and retribution, but Jesus seeks his betrayer out because he knows Peter is so much more than that moment of weakness. Every time he addresses Peter he says, Peter, son of John – there is so much more to him than his failure. Jesus gets breakfast ready for Peter, because he knows that his friend is hungry not just

for bread, but for reconciliation and forgiveness. Jesus feeds him with a meal that nourishes him in the moment, and also sets him free for a different future.

As they eat breakfast together, Jesus asks Peter three times – notice the return of that number three. For a friend who had betrayed three times, now he gets a chance to say something else three times. “Yes, Lord, I love you.” And Jesus says back to him, three times, “Feed my sheep.” In other words, live the rest of your days no longer consumed by shame, by inadequacy, by fear – live to feed others. With bread and with grace.

Sometimes when we talk about the brokenness and injustice in our world, we can feel some of the same feelings that Peter felt. We may feel guilty for having too much in a world where so many do not have enough. We may feel ashamed for living our days so consumed with our own issues that we fail to see and respond to the plight of our neighbor. We may feel inadequate, wondering if what we’re able to do does anything to change the reality that 822 million people in our world are hungry, that 1 in 4 kids are at risk of hunger in the United States.

Those feelings are real, and they’re part of what comes with living with eyes wide open to the injustice in our world. And yet, every time we gather, Jesus, as he did with Simon Peter, prepares a meal for us, to feed us with his presence and his grace. Jesus comes to offer forgiveness and renewal so that we don’t get stuck in the stories of inadequacy or shame that can keep us from living as God calls us to live, or from feeding as God calls us to feed.

Today, church, we’re taking to heart Jesus’ commandment to “feed his sheep.” To be clear, we’re involved in efforts to feed the hungry year-round, but today it is the focus of our service. We’re doing it quite literally by collecting all this food that will go to hungry families in our community this week. And we’re

doing it by taking time in just a couple minutes to write letters to Congress to advocate for programs that feed the hungry, and for policies that work toward eradicating poverty and hunger in our world. Our goal is to hand-deliver 250 letters from Bethlehem Lutheran Church, and before worship started this morning, we're at around ! We're going to watch a short video now from Bread for the World, which is the non-partisan organization that sponsors the "Offering of Letters" campaign every year, and then we will take about 10 minutes to write our own letters on the paper that's provided in your pews. I'll give you a few more instructions for that after the video is over.

Beloved of God, because we know what it is to be fed – to be fed daily bread and to be fed daily grace, may we go into the world and show our love for God by feeding all of God's children.

Amen.