

## Come and Have Breakfast

My friend Mary Lake, who was 20 years sober in AA when I met her and 30 years sober when she died, used to say that the best gift anyone could give someone else is the gift of a new day. Wiping the slate clean. Forgetting the past. Starting fresh. The gift of a new day.

In the days and weeks following the Lord's resurrection, nobody needed a new day more than Peter. Here's a guy who never got it for the longest time. He was the one who, when Jesus asked: "Who do people say that I am?" yelled out, "You are the Messiah!"

But, within a few minutes, once Jesus got done telling them what the consequences of that were, Peter is called a Satan and told to get lost.

Or the time Peter was invited to join Jesus in walking on the water, only to sink into the depths when fear took the place of faith. He fell asleep in the garden while Jesus sweated drops of blood. "Can't you wait one hour with me?" Jesus asked.

It was Peter's sword that cut off the guard's ear when they came to arrest Jesus. "Put it away!" Jesus scolded. "If you live by the sword, you'll die by it too."

Even when the women bring news of the empty tomb, of seeing the risen Lord, according to Peter: "Nonsense!"

Peter was an intensely practical man. Life was what he could see, touch, taste, feel and hear. There was nothing more to it than that. Except, that as one of the first called by Jesus, he also kept encountering life that was not so easy to explain. He was there, even if for a moment, walking on the water with Jesus.

He was there when Jesus brought the daughter of Jairus back from the dead. He was there when Lazarus came stumbling out of the tomb. But Peter was an intensely practical man.

Much of what he experienced with Jesus just didn't sink in. His practical view of the world wouldn't let it in. And then Jesus was killed. Life doesn't get much more practical than death, does it?

And then.... First one. Then two. Then, today, a third appearance. In between, they all went back to what they knew. They were, after all, and all of them, practical men. But even that seemed to be a failure.

A boatload of professional fishermen, couldn't catch a minnow all night. How embarrassing! And once again, a stranger on the shore points the way. The same

stranger who years earlier pulled them off those very same boats, away from those very same nets, and said: "Follow me."

The one they ate with, laughed with, learned from, still, so very much the stranger to them.

Right from the start, Peter knew he was an odd choice for Jesus to choose. The first words we hear from Peter in all the gospels echo in the last words we hear from Peter in St. John's gospel: "Leave me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Indeed.

You have to wonder what must Peter have been thinking? No question he was elated that once again, Jesus was there again. But you gotta believe he felt dread too. Only a week or two had passed since he denied him, ate his own words about going down with him.

Shame and dread.

Perhaps made worse when he saw the charcoal fire already lit. It was, after all, a charcoal fire that he warmed himself on when that little girl confronted him: "You're one of them!"

Into that scene, into those memories, Peter stepped, onto the beach, soaking wet, out of breath from his swim. Only to hear the words: "Come, and have breakfast."

Jesus the Messiah. Jesus the Christ. Jesus the Anointed one. Jesus the Suffering Servant. And today, Jesus, the short-order cook.

"Come and have breakfast."

And what he is cooking up is Peter's redemption. Three times: "Do you love me?" Three times: "You know I do!" Three times: "Feed my lambs."

And with that, Peter's standpoint has changed from the charcoal fire in the high priest's courtyard to this charcoal fire, lit by the Lord; and Peter's viewpoint of himself, of his Lord, of reality itself, has shifted.

His denials are cancelled. He is restored. By himself he hauls in the net of 153 fish. 153, representing the entire membership of the church. Every last one of us, in every shape and size. The whole motley crew!

"To haul" in Greek is the same word as "to draw". As when Jesus said: "When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself." Peter hauls in the fish, all of the fish.

However blurry, Peter begins to see the world as Jesus sees it. However haltingly,

Peter begins to do what Jesus did.

There is the story of Fred Snodgrass. He played centerfield for the New York Giants during the 1912 World Series. They were playing against the Boston Red Sox. In the 6<sup>th</sup> game of the Series, Fred caught a fly ball, and then dropped it. A run scored. The Sox went on to win the Series. When he died some 66 years later, in his obituary, the New York Times reported:

Fred Snodgrass

Ball Player

Muffed fly ball.

Until that encounter with Jesus on the beach, Peter's fate was the same:

Valued apostle

Impetuous

Denied his best friend three times.

If you have ever felt you have fallen too far, wandered away to a place of no return, think about Peter. The rock on whom the church is built had feet of clay indeed. Of all the apostles, he was the most wounded. The wounds were often self-inflicted. And in that, we have a real brother in Peter.

It has been said that a person can choose only in the world he can see. For Peter, for you, and for me, the world we see too often is one that is hostile, that requires our best efforts just to keep from drowning, that demands our full control and maximum effort.

Alas, this is not the world made new in Jesus. And to gain the eyes needed to see the world made new by Jesus, our efforts, our maximum efforts, must often blow up in our faces. Shaming us. Confusing us.

The shame, the confusion, is not intended to punish. It is intended to encourage a surrender. A surrender of our maximum effort. A surrender of control. That is the painful letting go that Peter endured; it is the same letting go Jesus demands of you and of me.

In the letting go dawns the gift of a new day: when the slate is wiped clean, the past forgotten, the start made fresh again. Only now, the fresh start begins in a world made new by Jesus. A world where we (quoting Stringfellow):

“In the midst of chaos, celebrate the word; amidst babel, speak the truth! Confront the noise and verbage and falsehood of death with the truth and potency and efficacy of the word of God! Know the word, teach the word, nurture the word, preach the word, defend the word, incarnate the word, do the word, live the word! And more than that, in the word of God, expose death and all death’s wiles, rebuke lies, cast out demons, exorcise, cleanse the possessed; raise those who are dead in mind and conscience!”

This is the new day that Peter struggled to open his eyes to see. This is the new day created in the resurrection of Christ. This is the new day that you and I live in. May we be given the grace to embrace it; the grace to let it embrace us.

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