

BREAKFAST ON THE BEACH
A STORY OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

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As many of you know I'm taking part in the Academy for Biblical Storytelling. One of the things I am working on is developing my 60 minute 1 person show. I am including this week's story along with the Doubting Thomas passage because I am going to use most of the resurrection appearances for the second half of the show. Wendy was working on memorizing this passage for her parish this week and mentioned that she was also going to use this in her 1 hour show. I asked her "Why? I thought you are doing stories of healing as a theme." She replied, "Well this is a healing story, the healing of a relationship." I immediately thought, well that will preach.

For 2000 years and especially in the early church the Easter story centered around sacrifice. Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. This has long been viewed as a blood sacrifice to appease an angry God. A God who is so angry at us that we can only appease him by offering a blood sacrifice. Now if stating the crucifixion that graphically makes you squirm a little it should. I was watching a video with the Wednesday evening Bible Study and I believe it was Richard Rohr said that no sooner had Jesus overthrown the concept of blood sacrifice in the temple then the early church returned to it within the first 200 years! That is what the cleansing of the temple is about. Jesus is saying that God does not want blood sacrifice. And there are multiple references in the Old Testament that state that God does not desire blood sacrifices.

So what do we then do with the cross? Well Richard Rohr teaches that we can then see the cross for what it is. Not an altar where blood is shed so we can change God's mind about us, but an altar where God changes our minds about God. The cross is all about reconciliation but not necessarily in the way that so many of us have been taught for years. I will admit this idea of an angry God that required sacrifice kept me out of the church for many years. I had to deal with an angry earthly father and the last thing I wanted was an image of God that was identical to what I already had here! This offers another and legitimate view of salvation.

The ultimate meaning of Easter is one of healing and reconciliation. There is a chant that is sung at the Easter Vigil that is called the Exsultet. There is a line in there that says, "How blessed is this night, when earth and heaven are joined and man is reconciled to God." Listen to the promise in those words. Heaven and earth are joined. Man is reconciled to God. Listen to the healing in that statement. So what helps support Richard in this teaching?

At the beginning of the video and there are seven in the series that are on reconciliation that we are watching on Wednesday night a story is told about when this now older theologian was a young boy and his dad good naturedly asked him about a little red haired girl he seemed interested in. Well the son got all embarrassed and then angry and said some things to his dad that he regretted as soon as they came out of his mouth. He knew that his daddy would have been well within his rights to “knock him out of his chair” but he didn’t. He knew that the words hurt his dad yet his dad didn’t retaliate. He said, “I knew at that moment there was nothing I could do that would make my daddy stop loving me.” He then closed by saying the same is true of God.

Paul tells us and these are words that are used in our funeral service, that nothing can separate us from the love of God. He gives that long list but the point is that we may choose to separate ourselves from God, but nothing can truly cause God to remove his love for us. How do we know this other than this rather direct statement by Paul? This is where our Gospel comes in this morning.

Here is how today’s Peter story is about reconciliation as much as a resurrection appearance. Look at the detail in the story. Now as I train as a storyteller I am getting better and better at looking at how the Bible is not a narrative, not a history book, but a series of stories. These are stories that teach us about God. That doesn’t mean it isn’t true or the word of God, but it is story written for a culture that lived by story. Focus with me if you will on the end of the John passage.

Jesus has built a fire, a charcoal fire on the beach and is cooking fish when Peter puts his clothes on, jumps in the water and swims to shore. Peter can’t wait for the boat to get there. Note that this is specifically mentioned as a charcoal fire. The more natural fire on a beach would be regular wood or drift wood, but this is charcoal, not something you would find on the beach. Now think back and remember, when was the last time a charcoal fire is mentioned in John’s gospel? Yes in the courtyard outside the palace where Jesus is being questioned. Who was standing by this charcoal fire? Peter! What happened around that fire? Peter denies Jesus three times. Are you starting to see a pattern here?

Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me” and each time tells him to feed his sheep, care for his sheep. Now it is important to note that we miss an important word play in this passage. Jesus is using the word *agape* and Peter is using *filio*. So you could read this as follows:

Jesus: “Simon do you love me unconditionally?”

Peter, “I love you as a friend/family.”

Jesus, “Feed my lambs

Then this is repeated with a minor variation. The third time, are you catching this, Peter denies Jesus three times and Jesus now asks him three times do you love

me, Jesus changes from agape to filio. At that moment Peter is crushed, once again Peter isn't quite up to the challenge, yet does Jesus walk away? NO! He tells him again feed my sheep. Even though Peter isn't able to give everything Jesus still uses him.

Is this the image of a vengeful angry God? Not at all. If we believed in an angry vengeful God why in the world would Jesus have this conversation with Peter? The intimate, close disciple who betrayed him three times before the crucifixion, is reconciled after Easter morning and told to care for the disciples that are left behind.

This is why this passage works as a healing passage. Peter I would guess, is anguished by his betrayal and probably wishing he had it to do over. I wonder if he was thinking how can I ever atone for what I did that night? He does not need to atone, but Jesus comes and makes the reconciliation.

The message of Easter is of God's great love for us. No matter how you may understand the cross, the ultimate message is of God's unconditional love for each one of us. And to that I say AMEN.