**[1]** Third Sunday after Easter, May 4, 2025 (CWS Kit Sunday)
Sermon Title: A Heavenly Breakfast
Scripture: John 21:1-19
Theme: Jesus invites us to be and share the Good News!

**[2]** In our scripture today, Simon Peter’s response to the Easter Event begins by hanging out the “Gone Fishing” sign.  Remember the Easter morning message, recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, to the women who visited the empty tomb: “go back to Galilee where Jesus will join you sometime soon.”   Seven disciples have gone back to the Sea of Galilee where it all started for them, where they had left their nets and started following Jesus as “fishers of men.”    And Peter hangs out the “Gone Fishing” sign.  Perhaps, this is NOT the type of sign we might put up on our store fronts when we want to take a vacation from work. Subconsciously, does Peter want to go back to work at his original job as if nothing had happened with Jesus?  As if the last several years of following Jesus were for naught and we must now find a way to make a living again. Perhaps, Peter is saying:  “Well, if we are going to have to wait around for a while, we might as well be trying to catch some fish while we wait.”  There is just something about being out in those boats, away from the mass of people, working with your hands, trying to outmaneuver the fish and win the competition of man versus fish. Or, perhaps Peter is not serious about catching fish, perhaps he is only going to sit in the boat and reflect on the past several years of his life.   Now what?   Jesus is gone.   Now what do we do?

One of the primary Hebrew words that appears in the Old Testament is the word: “yatsar” which means to re-frame a problem, to squeeze it into shape and mold it into a form, as a potter does with clay.  To re-purpose a tool or to re-fashion a design to solve the problem.  Perhaps, Simon Peter is re-framing the last few years of his life with Jesus.  I didn’t understand what he was saying when we were on the road, that he would be crucified and, in three days, rise again; that his Kingdom was not of this world; that we should not raise the sword to hasten the Kingdom, the Reign of God being in the hearts of people everywhere.  Perhaps, Simon Peter needs time to squeeze his understanding into shape before he meets the Lord again. Not easy for a man who acts first and then thinks later.   “Measure twice, cut once” was not Peter’s way of doing things. But, now he must learn a new way.  Perhaps, there is a little bit of all of these reasons behind the “Gone Fishing” sign. Whatever the reason, all seven disciples are anxious to join Peter at fishing.  All night long, they toss out their nets, but they catch nothing. Familiar anyone?   Bait not working.   Fish aren’t hungry.    They’re staying on the bottom.    Remember that village in Samaria where we had to dust off our feet and move on, just no response at all to the gospel! Yeah, we got in trouble for staying too long. We could not heal the little boy because we did not pray hard enough.    But, what now, are we able to pray enough now?

**[3]** Just about that time, in the early morning, someone calls out from the beach:  “What, no fish ?” “Cast your nets to the right side of the boat and you will find some.”    So, why not?   Let’s try this side of the boat.  H. V. Morton describes an ancient practice of fishing that combines a man on the shore with a man in the boat off shore.

“One had wadded out from the shore and was casting a bell net into the water. But time after time the net came up empty.  It was a beautiful sight to see him casting.  Each time the neatly folded net belled out in the air and fell so precisely on the water that the small lead weights hit the lake at the same moment making a thin circular splash.  While he was waiting for another cast, Abdul shouted to him from the bank to fling to the left, which he instantly did.  This time he was successful…Then he drew up the net and we could see the fish struggling in it.  It happens very often that the man with the hand-net must rely on the advice of someone on the shore, who tells him to cast either to the left or the right, because in the clear water he can often see a shoal of fish invisible to the man in the water.”

**[4]** Continuing with the disciples, “Whoa, look at the fish over here?   How could we have missed so many fish?    Get them into the net as fast as you can?    The nets are breaking.    Hurry up and mend them.  We need more nets. Now, wait just a minute here, where have we heard this before?    Remember when we first saw Jesus, when he climbed into our boat and started teaching the crowds on shore.    Remember how he challenged us, after we had fished all night without catching anything, to put out into deep water and cast our nets there?    (Luke 5:4-8)   Who is that guy on shore, anyway?    Hey, guys, it is Jesus, look! Here we might infer the words of Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus:  When they recognized the risen Jesus they said: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened the scriptures to us?” Simon Peter puts on his clothes and jumps into the water to swim to shore.  It was the custom in the ancient world to be clothed when greeting someone—so what if one were totally wet, Peter wanted to be the first to greet the Lord. Certainly, Peter’s heart must have been burning, as Cleopas had said, burning with expectation.    There is an old fishing phrase that fishermen use on occasion:  If you want to be successful, you must keep your worms warm. Fish love to bite on warm worms.   We must present ourselves as fishers of people in an inviting way, ready at each moment to greet others with the reason for the hope we have in Christ Jesus.

**[5]** Albert Einstein once shared a note with the family of one of his colleagues named Besso on March 15, 1955, who had recently died:

“So, in quitting this strange world, he has once again preceded me by a little.  That doesn’t mean anything.  For those of us who believe in physics, this separation between past, present, and future is only an illusion, however tenacious.”

For Peter, truly the past, present and future were squeezed into this one moment as he swam to the shore, excited to see Jesus again.  The other disciples steered the boat ashore with the nets full of fish. Jesus asks them to bring some of the fish over to the charcoal fire for breakfast. So, Simon retreats to the boat to help haul the fish ashore. The scripture tells us that there were 153 **[6]** large fish in the net.  Why 153 ?   Most scholars think that the number is symbolic of the future ministry which the Christ will ask of his disciples. Cyril of Alexandria thought that 100 represents the full ness of the Gentiles who will be gathered in to the church and 50 stands for the remant of Israel who will also be gathered in and 3 stands for the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in which all shall be baptized.  Augustine notes that 153 is the sum of the first 17 numbers, with 10 being the number of the Law and 7 the number of grace, the gifts of the Spirit being sevenfold, so that all those coming to Christ by Law or Grace are summed up symbolically with the number 153. Jerome notes that there are 153 different types of fish in the known sea of his time, so that 153 symbolizes that all the nations will be gathered together in Christ Jesus, and further that the net or church is big enough to hold them all.    The mission of the church to come will be universal.

Why would the disciples take the time to count each fish in the net?    Jesus was offering them breakfast over the fire.  How could they resist?   Estimate the number as 153 because they caught every type of fish in the sea.   Move on to the fire to learn more about where Jesus would have them go and what he would have them do.   As they laughed and teased and enjoyed the fire, the fish and the bread that Jesus brought them, little did they suspect the challenge yet to come.

**[7]** Simon, son of John, “do you love me more than these?”    Do you *agape* me?   Simon Peter says: Lord, you know that I do, then Jesus says: *Boske arnia,* feed my little lambs, nourish them, pasture them, protect them… Again, Jesus asks Peter:, “Simon, son of John, to you love me?  Do you *agape* me?  Again Peter says: You know that I do.”  Then Jesus says: *Poimaine probata*, tend my sheep, guide them, pastor them, shepherd them, care for them.

A third time, Jesus asks:  “Simon, son of John, do you love me?  Do you *phila*s me?  He uses a different verb here in the Greek, do you have heartfelt affection for me, true friendship for me?

And Peter responds:  “Lord, you know that I do”, then Jesus says: *Boske probata*, feed my sheep, nourish them, pasture them, protect them.

There is some sense here in which Jesus is passing the mantle, the baton, to Peter, the one he once called the Rock on which He would build His Church.  He was handing Peter the Keys to the Reign of God, to be the one who would bind and loose in heaven and on earth, a very important job to which Peter was chosen.  In a sense, also, he was passing shepherd-status to Peter. “Feed my lambs, Tend my sheep, Feed my sheep.” Had not Peter been the one to deny Jesus, not once, but three times, and run from leadership as things began to get rough in Jerusalem?  Jesus is now trusting Peter with His sheep.  “Feed my lambs, Tend my sheep, Feed my sheep.”  They will listen to your voice now.  Lead them.  Protect them.  Call them by name.  Feed them.

What was it that the prophet Jeremiah said?  Do you remember? “I will raise up shepherds over my sheep who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, nor shall any be missing.” (Jer. 23:1-4).  And, the prophet, Isaiah, “Like a shepherd, God will tend His flock, In His arms,
He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom. He will gently lead the nursing ewes. (Is. 40:11)  And, the prophet Ezekiel, “Woe to shepherds who have been feeding themselves! Should
not the shepherds feed the flock?” (Ez. 34:2)  John asks us to beware of false shepherds, thieves and robbers who come in through a different door, whose only purposes are to steal, kill and destroy. These are the shepherds who feed and care only for themselves; who seek to sacrifice their sheep on the altar of selfishness, greed, lust, anger, and hatred.  These are the ones who build themselves up at the cost of their neighbor.  In the original language, the thieves and robbers are the “Up-Stepping Ones,” those climbing up the ladder of ambition and greed.  They
are literally, the ones scaling the walls rather than entering the front door with the proper credentials. The humble shepherds, the true shepherds, are the “Down-Stepping Ones.”  Jesus tells us that we, who witness in His name, who lose their life in order to find their life, will have a super-abundant life!  But, beware of those who have enough and want even more.  Beware of those who break in to steal your soul as well as your legacy and fortune.  They are false shepherds.  But, to those of us called to be true shepherds, Jesus says: “Feed my lambs, Tend my sheep, Feed my sheep.”

The challenge that Jesus presents to Simon Peter, and to the other disciples looking on, is the challenge of going beyond faith and reason.  To find a place in their lives where past, present and future are no longer separated and love is no longer tribal but universal, where swords are re-purposed into plowshares and the frame of our hope surrounds the grace of our lives. “To make disciples of all nations.”   “To witness to the ends of the earth.”   These are the universal claims of the Gospel. True today as they were then.    As we move closer to Pentecost, we will learn yet even more about the power available to us in the Spirit to take on the challenges in the Body of Christ.  . Alleluia! Amen.