

"Breakfast Anyone?"
A Sermon Delivered by Rev. John Balicki
3rd Sunday of Easter
May 4, 2025
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Wilton, Maine

"What nicer thing can you do for somebody than make them breakfast?" - Anthony Bourdain

"My wife and I tried two or three times in the last 40 years to have breakfast together, but it was so disagreeable we had to stop." - Winston Churchill

"I went to a restaurant that serves 'breakfast at any time'. So I ordered French Toast during the Renaissance" - Steven Wright

In the gospel we just heard, we have the only description of breakfast in the gospels – this scene where Jesus cooks some freshly caught fish on the beach for a few of his disciples. As our quotes suggest, it bespeaks a certain intimacy between Jesus and his friends and leads us to explore further what resurrection means to us.

In the Liturgical Year we have more Sundays of Easter than any other season outside of Ordinary Time. That was certainly based on 50 days from Easter to Pentecost but it has the added dimension of allowing us to explore the various dimensions of resurrection. We have looked already at what happened both on the morning of the third day after his crucifixion, as well as eight days later between Jesus and Thomas. We've explored the empty tomb, a description of Jesus' risen body, and resurrection as triumph over sin and death.

Today we build on the additional dimensions of resurrection that are transformation and forgiveness and we feature the main character of our gospel story, the disciple Peter, and throw in the apostle Paul from the first lesson as well. And then maybe get to ourselves as well. Transformation and forgiveness, who me?

Let's start with Peter. Even after Jesus rose from the dead, he was out fishing as is often depicted in the various gospels. After the big catch, Jesus invites them ashore by saying "Come have breakfast" but it is the conversation after the meal where Jesus is really heading.

Jesus asked Peter not once, but three times, "Peter, do you really love me?" Three times Peter replied, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." And then three times Jesus responded, "feed my sheep."

John employs a brilliant literary device here to connect two different stories. He writes how "Peter was hurt" by Jesus's three questions. I think that's because the triple query by Jesus provoked a painful memory of Peter's triple denial before another "charcoal fire."

Camp fires can be deeply evocative. Just a few days earlier, Peter had stood around a "charcoal fire" during the arrest of Jesus, when he denied three times that he even knew Jesus, after bragging that he would never desert him like the others did. Despite his triple denial at the first fire at night, and the triple query at the second fire in the morning, Jesus reaffirmed Peter three times with the words, "Feed my sheep." And so he forgave himself. He picked up the broken pieces to become the movement's unlikely but undisputed leader. There are three lists of the twelve apostles in the gospels, and in all three of them the imperfect and impetuous Peter is listed first.

This week's first lesson from the Acts of the Apostles tells the story of Paul's Damascus road conversion. The greatest persecutor of the church became its greatest propagator, eventually traveling over 10,000 miles to spread the gospel before dying a martyr's death in Rome.

Before his dramatic conversion, Paul "breathed out murderous threats." He imprisoned believers, and tried to exterminate the church. He says that he was proud of his righteous zeal. And Ananias was forced to see Paul in a new light, as a transformed person and he resisted at first but eventually baptized him. And then over the course of the next thirty years Paul traveled untold miles and wrote untold letters for the sake of the gospel.

But even as an old man Paul was haunted by his sordid past, writing to his young protege Timothy: "I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor." He called himself "the worst of sinners." But, like Peter, Paul made peace with his broken past and his shadow self: "forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward."

In the poem "Phase One" from her book, "Bring Now the Angels", the Bangladeshi-American Dilruba Ahmed interrogates herself for the many manifestations of her shadow self. She leaves the fridge door open all night. She forgets to tend her plants. She feels like a bad mom. She loses her luggage. She's very hard on herself, and so the poem is all about learning to forgive herself as a necessary precursor to loving others.

The word "forgive" occurs thirteen times in the poem like a sort of mantra that she repeats to herself, building to a crescendo. First, one time, "I forgive you." Then twice: "I forgive you. I forgive you." And then, having treated her mother with contempt when she deserved compassion, three times: "I forgive you. I forgive you. I forgive you."

And so the title of the poem — forgiving myself is the "first phase" of spiritual maturity. It's a necessary beginning. Compassion towards myself liberates me to love others. In the last four lines of her poem, Ahmed even forgives herself for not forgiving herself: "For being unable / to forgive yourself first so you / could then forgive others and / at last find a way to become / the love that you want in this world."

In his book "Art and Faith", Makoto Fujimura devotes an entire chapter to *kintsugi* — literally, "golden joinery." In kintsugi as an artistic technique, instead of hiding a flaw in a piece of broken pottery, the artist highlights and even celebrates the damage by repairing it. Kintsugi is also a more general philosophy that understands breakage and repair as normal parts of human life. Instead of denying or hiding our faults and failures, we embrace our imperfections. In this Japanese aesthetic, the wear, tear, and damage on a physical object are marks of beauty to treasure and honor, not a reason to discard it. Perhaps like the wounds on the hands and feet of the resurrected Jesus, like Peter's triple denial of Jesus, like Paul's persecution of early Christians, the resurrection of Jesus makes us new, transforms us but doesn't remake us. We see beauty in our brokenness — all is made new, a new day begins. Breakfast anyone?