

Breakfast With Jesus

I'm not someone who loves to cook. In normal times we eat at home most days because it's healthier for us and the planet. But we have "I don't feel like cooking let's eat out days" with some regularity. Now, we get carry out a couple times a week to support local businesses, but it's not the same.

These days I'm cooking way more than usual. Just one of those things we do now.

Daryl is more of a cook than me, but since I work from home it makes sense for me to do most of the supper cooking. Breakfast is a different story.

Daryl gets tired of the same old things for breakfast, so often on the weekends he'll makes pancakes, or omelets or breakfast burritos...this morning it was French toast and bacon.

Me? I do the grocery shopping and wonder if a pandemic is a good enough excuse to buy Lucky Charms.

But it's nice to have someone cook for you. Cooking a meal for someone is an act of love.

So I love this tender image of Jesus cooking breakfast for his disciples.

We've always been told breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Now there's this intermittent fasting thing people talk about, which basically seems to amount to skipping breakfast. I'm not sold. I'm going to stick with breakfast as the most important meal of the day.

For many of us, breakfast is the start of the day. Breakfast, even if it's just something quick, marks the division between sleeping and the activities of being awake. We break the fast of our night's sleep, and then head out to do whatever it is we do – work, childcare, homeschooling, or just trying to make it through the day.

One of the things that keeps coming up in my different devotional reading is the concept of Liminal space or liminal time. The word liminal comes from a Latin word meaning threshold.

A liminal space or liminal time is a space or time in between two other things. An example of a physical liminal space is a stairway. Stairways exist to get you from one place to another. Folks usually don't just hang out in a stairway. It's an in between place.

The time right after a graduation – before you've started whatever comes next – is a liminal time.

Breakfast can be a kind of metaphor for liminal space or time. That's how this story functions. Breakfast with Jesus on the beach happens in that liminal time between what was and what is to come.

Remember what the disciples just come through. They've lived through the roller coaster of their week in Jerusalem...the high of Jesus' triumphal entry, the increasing tension and threat as the week moved on. They saw Jesus arrested, beaten and crucified.

They've lived through the grief and dashed hopes of those days immediately following his crucifixion.

Now, they know that he's been raised from the dead, but they still don't know what's next. They are living in a liminal time and space.

They know that what was is no more and can't be, yet they are uncertain what the future holds. They're likely stressed by that uncertainty and how nothing's the same as it used to be. Maybe they're worn out from the roller coaster of emotions over the events of Holy Week and the days following Jesus' resurrection.

Rather than just sit with that, several of them decide to go fishing. Now, this isn't recreational fishing. Remember, fishing was the occupation of several of the disciples. So it's not really just a desire to get away from it all and relax on the lake for a few hours.

For the disciples to decide to go fishing means basically returning to their old life...the life before they met Jesus...the life that they were born and raised to. The life that is familiar to them.

Life in that liminal space between what was and the uncertainty of what is to come just got too uncomfortable.

The life of a fisherman after all wasn't a terrible life. Hard, but then following Jesus was no picnic either. At least they've got something to go back to.

But the problem is that what was could no longer be. The definition of a liminal time means that what came before is lost and what's to come isn't yet known.

The disciples' attempt to return to normal was met with failure. The emptiness of their nets says that they can't capture the old normal again.

Now, still unsettled, tired, and with empty nets they head back to shore.

Although they don't seem to recognize him right away, on the beach there stands their beloved teacher. Under his direction, they put their nets back in the water – and you know what happens. They catch all sorts of fish.

As the tired but elated disciples haul in their catch, Jesus cooks them breakfast over a charcoal fire.

Jesus is there to help them through the liminal space and time...but there's no easy way around it. Trying to return to the old life just isn't a possibility.

Jesus doesn't give them a road map to their new future. In next week's reading, he'll have some instructions. But there will be no roadmap...no strategic plan for the post-resurrection mission of the disciples.

So for right now, they are left with nothing but to just be in this liminal time...this in between time. And to trust that somehow Jesus will show them the way.

What they have for now is this image...this memory of Jesus tenderly caring for them. Feeding them breakfast as they sit between what was and what will be.

We are in a liminal space and time right now. That's why it keeps showing up in the different spiritual readings I encounter.

And it isn't very comfortable.

There's a strong sense that after this is over we either can't or shouldn't just go back to the way things have always been. And by over I mean completely over. We know that there are likely to be varying degrees of restriction for quite a while.

What I mean is when the pandemic can truly be declared over...when there's a vaccine...and enough immunity in the population it becomes like other respiratory viruses.

When we reach that point, will we even be able to go back to exactly the things were before? And are we sure we want to? This crisis is revealing pretty starkly the cracks in our society...the places where things really shouldn't go back to the way they were. It's showing who does and who doesn't benefit from the way things were...who falls through those cracks.

How should the church be that might be different than what was before? How can this all actually make us better disciples?

I don't know about you, but I keep trying to figure out what new normal should look like. It is tiring and honestly I'm coming up about as empty as the disciples fishing nets were.

But see that's the thing about liminal spaces. If we knew the roadmap...if we had a strategic plan...it wouldn't be liminal.

In a liminal space, there's not much choice but to remain in it. If we could manipulate it or escape it, it wouldn't be liminal.

In a liminal space there's just us...people who have always been trying to understand what it means to follow Jesus...and Jesus, the risen Christ.

Liminal spaces and times are when we are no longer so certain of our own ability to fix things. They are the times when we have to remain in the discomfort long enough to learn what it has to teach us. Now we have to simply be with Jesus...in prayer...reflection...silence...to sit in the quiet of his presence.

Jesus may not literally be making us breakfast – and if he were I'd rather not have fish. But he is caring for us. He is nourishing us with his presence. He is sitting with us in the uncomfortableness of this in between time.

If we are faithful, we will gradually discern a new direction for the church...for the places we work...for our social institutions like education and health care. It will be especially our call as the church to pray and be attentive to where Jesus might be leading.

But for now, what we have to hang on to is the image of a savior who loves us and cares for us...this image of the risen Lord, savior of the universe, son of the almighty God...cooking fish for his exhausted, unsettled disciples.