

A Cup of Hope with Breakfast
John 21:1-19 and Colossians 1:3-8
Third Sunday of Eastertide

I spent the last three months in South Africa and arrived home on Wednesday of Holy Week. And let me tell you. Jet lag did a number on me. I was just coherent enough to realize that I was exhausted and disoriented and just clear-minded enough to see the irony of that during Holy Week. But that was it. I started to write a blog post about it on Good Friday, but my brain was so fuzzy I couldn't get further than: "I'm jet lagged—I bet this is how the disciples felt." A good point, but not exactly an entire article. I spent the weekend looking forward to Sunday, surely by then the jet lag would be over. After all, Easter was coming to put an end to the disorientation and the exhaustion for all of us.

As promised, Sunday came and I had a great Easter—reunited with my parents, worshipping here with you, delicious Easter lunch. It was a beautiful, fun day. But the fuzzy, jet lag brain was still there. It would be another 24 hours before I could write about being jet lagged through Holy Week and even then, I had to ask a friend to read it to make sure it wasn't an incoherent mess. And now? Well, it's been two weeks since Easter and I am *still* trying to find a routine and rhythm.

Which is why I can imagine how Peter felt when we find him, who knows how long after the resurrection, headed toward his fishing boat. It's tempting to think, "Fishing? Why?!" But I get it. As much as he doesn't want to be, he is still disoriented and exhausted and can't quite find the rest he so desperately needs. So, he does what always used to give him relief in the past. Only his coping mechanism is far more productive than mine—I've been catching up on all the tv I missed. At least Peter's all-night binge-ing *should* result in breakfast.

But it doesn't. At least not at first. Peter and the disciples fish all night and catch nothing. And no matter how hard they try, even as they cast out their nets and slowly pull them in, allowing muscle memory to take over and resurrect a skill they haven't used in years... they can't seem to catch a single fish. Apparently returning to a former career isn't even an option. What do they do now? It is dark—they are confused and not sure what to feel.

Yes, Jesus is risen. This is *good* news. But they also witnessed the horror of the crucifixion and risen Jesus or not, this isn't something that is easily erased from your memory. Sure, they've encountered the risen Christ—they've seen the resurrected life bearing the scars as proof that it is really him, but they also saw the scars when they were fresh wounds. They may have encountered the risen Christ, but they have encountered death too. I'm sure they want to be full of joy only. To celebrate, uninhibited, not at all phased by the pain that happened before. But that is not possible, they have experienced too much. Now they are left a jumbled mix of emotions—full of joy and awe, but also still reeling from the pain and unsure of what to do next. To make matters worse, the one they committed their lives to following, the one who is supposed to show them where to go and tell them what to do, keeps popping in and out without warning and they have no idea how to track him down in between.

I understand that lost feeling and I'm guessing many of you do too; that wrestling match with all the emotions: Feeling the joy of new life but struggling to reconcile the pain and heartache that seem unescapable. Knowing without a shadow of a doubt that you made it, all is well, but exhausted by the realization that there is still so far to go.

I want to sing them a song I discovered during this latest battle with jet lag, by a new favorite artist of mine, JJ Heller.

*I see the tears sitting on your cheeks
I know you're tired, fall now to sleep
Stop fighting so hard, it's time to surrender
Raise your white flag and always remember*

*Your heart will feel lighter
Everything will be brighter
Find peace in knowing*

That all will be well in the morning
In the morning
All will be well
*All will be well in the morning*¹

I want to sing them this lullaby because I know what happens next. I know that at the end of the long, dark night, just as day breaks, Jesus will be standing on the shore, at first unrecognizable in the shadows of mourning, calling out to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” And I know that when they surrender, Jesus is ready with a solution.

The disciples must be at the end of their rope because it is super unlike them to answer any question with a simple, “no.” This time there is no arguing, no justifying, no sassy retort or muttering under their breath “you don’t think we’ve tried that already?!” When this stranger tells them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, they just do. They’ve tried everything, but they are tired and at their wits end, might as well try it again; one last ditch effort before calling it quits for good.

And with that, the story picks up the pace. They’ve been moving slowly, shuffling their feet, wandering around in a fog, when suddenly, it is quite literally all hands on deck, as they scurry to secure the nets that are now sagging with the weight of their abundant catch. Thanks be to God one of them is able to stop in the midst of the chaos and realize who has been calling from the beach. I guess sometimes it takes a net full of fish and a little daylight to recognize the risen Christ. And thanks be to God this one whom Jesus loved had the courage to speak aloud what he saw—“It is the Lord!”

It is this declaration that causes Peter to spring into action. I have to admit; I *love* this part of the story. It makes no sense, but our efforts to get to Jesus rarely do. The text tells us, “*When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea.*” I so want to know what was going on in Peter’s mind when he did this. I mean I get it, he’s on a fishing boat trying to catch fish, it makes sense that he would strip down, wouldn’t want to get his clothes wet and fishy. And I get not wanting to show up on shore to Jesus naked, that would be embarrassing. But why, in his haste, did he put *on* clothes to jump out of a boat and into the water. No matter how you shake it, he’s going to arrive on shore wet and fishy and less than presentable. Just wait, man!

I did some research on this strange detail—it’s such a weird thing to include, there must be a reason. Some scholars suggest when we read this part, we should be reminded of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1, putting on clothes and hiding from God in shame. Perhaps this verse shows us that the resurrection redeems the shame of Adam & Eve.² But I am reminded of a different story. When I read this verse, I immediately see the same eager Peter stepping out of the boat in Matthew 14. Only this time, there is no fear. Instead of asking permission and waiting to be invited, Peter throws on some clothes and springs out of the boat. Did Peter put on clothes confident that this time he would walk on top of the water, arriving appropriately dressed and dry to greet his Lord? Or maybe he didn’t care whether he walked on the water or not. Maybe he got caught between the desire to meet Jesus with proper respect and the urge to meet him *immediately*.³ Maybe the hope of eating breakfast with Jesus launched him from the boat with a new found faith made possible only through the power of resurrection.

The rest of the disciples follow in the boat, hauling their catch toward Jesus. It’s too heavy to bring into the boat but I’m guessing as the sky gets brighter with the morning sun, it doesn’t matter how heavy the net is, their spirits are already feeling lighter and a familiar sense of peace is settling in their hearts. Jesus is on the shore. Breakfast is roasting on the fire and they don’t even need a cup of coffee; their hearts are re-energized with hope. All is well.

Jesus asks them to add some of their catch to the breakfast he has already started and then invites them to eat. And they don’t have to wonder anymore if their eyes were deceiving them, if this was some kind of mirage made out of what they had been longing for. No, the smell of fish on the fire, the sound of Jesus’ invitation, the feel of the bread in their

¹ *In the Morning*, JJ Heller.

² *Feasting on the Word*, Joseph A. Bessler.

³ Based on some research from the *New Interpreter’s Bible: Luke-John (Volume 9)*, Leander E. Keck.

hands, the taste of hope on their tongues, those familiar mannerisms as Jesus hosted the meal ... they knew they had once again encountered the Risen Christ.

When breakfast is finished, I imagine them lingering around the camp fire, sharing stories, talking about the events of the past weeks, when that famous conversation happens between Jesus and Peter. Jesus, like any good mentor, asks a question, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Three times the Good Shepherd asks, and three times Peter responds without hesitation. His love for Jesus overflows with a resounding “yes” and unwavering faith—“you *know* I do.” This one who, just a few weeks prior, denied even knowing Jesus, doesn’t wonder whether his love is obvious—the resurrection has redeemed all of that.

And Jesus’ response to Peter’s declaration of love? Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. In other words—love me by loving my people. And then Jesus offers a word of warning: “*Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go. Follow me.*”⁴ I think Jesus is making an important clarification here: “I know I said feed my sheep but I’m not talking about a weekly trip to the petting zoo. A Good Shepherd is willing to lay down his life for his sheep. Love knows no limits—I have shown you that. Now, follow me.”

Recently, I was tasked with writing about the significance behind the Door of Hope logo. Door of Hope was founded in 1999 when Cheryl Allen, a pastor in South Africa, noticed that 3500 babies were being abandoned in South Africa each year—in garbage cans, sewage drains, fields. She and her church, located in downtown Johannesburg, decided to put a box in the wall of the church where mothers could safely and anonymously abandon their children. It was quite literally a door that provided hope to some of South Africa’s most vulnerable children. 20 years later Door of Hope still exists, now with three baby houses that care for 70-80 babies until they are adopted by their forever families. Our logo is a combination of three symbols that communicate our core values: faith, hope, and love. Two of these are Adinkra symbols—created by the Ashanti tribe in West Africa. These symbols carry important meanings and were often stamped repeatedly to create patterned fabric. Because there was no Adinkra symbol for faith we created our own, an African crown with a cross on the top, professing Jesus as Lord. We use the Adinkra symbol for Hope which is translated, “By God’s grace, all will be well” and Love, translated: “Love always find a way home.” These three symbols combined, make up our Door of Hope logo.⁵

It’s a pretty cool story to tell and I was looking forward to writing about it. But I wanted scripture to help me tell it. So naturally, I turned to 1 Corinthians 13:13: “*So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*”⁶ But then I got stuck. If the greatest of the three is love—why aren’t we called “Door of Love?” We do provide a whole lot of love to the children in our care. And I believe in doing so, we are loving Christ as well. I mean nothing says “tend my sheep” like changing 10,000 diapers a month. But that’s not our name. Why hope?

I wrestled with this for a while until I stumbled across the first chapter in Colossians.

*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your **faith** in Christ Jesus and of the **love** you have for all God’s people— the **faith** and **love** that spring from the **hope** stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.*⁷

Suddenly my pen was flying in my journal... faith and love that *spring* from hope. At Door of Hope we rescue children from seemingly hopeless situations. We care for them until they are no longer ours to tend to—with faith that the work we do matters, and that God will continue to care for them long after they leave us. And we love them the best way we

⁴ John 21:18-19, New Revised Standard Version.

⁵ To learn more about Door of Hope visit www.doorofhope.co.za

⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:13, NRSV.

⁷ Colossians 1:3-5, New International Version.

know how—feeding them bottle after bottle, tending to their developmental needs and of course a ridiculous amount of dirty diapers, getting covered in baby food and yogurt as we teach them to feed themselves. And we hope that when they leave us, they will recognize the risen Lord outside our walls and that their love for their Creator will in turn bring hope to others in seemingly hopeless situations.

Just two weeks after Easter, the lectionary brings us to this epilogue in John. And we find Peter springing out of his fishing boat, launched into action by the hope that only comes through an encounter with the Risen Christ. He jumps out in faith, an action that I think is best described in this song lyric, *“whether I sink, whether I swim, it makes no difference when, I’m beautifully in over my head.”*⁸ Peter doesn’t care whether he sinks or swims or walks on water—he is now all in and let’s be real, completely but beautifully in over his head; following this unpredictable Shepherd, feeding his sheep, wherever he leads, no matter what the cost.

Peter has something to teach us: This call to love, to follow, pulls us out of our comfort zones until we are in over our heads. It means precious cuddles *and* dirty diapers. It requires us to use our gifts *and* to try something we’ve never done before. This call to follow means keeping our eyes peeled, our ears attuned, even in the darkness, for those places where Jesus might appear. It means eating together and fishing together. It means feeding the hungry and teaching others how to fish and making sure there is room for everyone at the table. It asks us to speak up *and* to listen carefully. It demands that we help the voiceless find their voice and it will change what we always thought we knew, again and again.

I know, loving God’s people with this kind of limit-less love is exhausting and overwhelming. Sometimes we will do this super well and sometimes we will fall incredibly short and most of the time we will be average shepherds. Tending sheep will bring immense joy *and* immense pain. And wrestling with the tension of all these emotions can often leave us feeling disoriented and a little jet lagged. Sometimes, despite the fact that we logically know Christ is risen and that all is well, when we are stuck in the in-between, unsure of where to go next, it can be really hard to find hope. When the night comes, when the in-between gets too heavy, hang in there, keep your eyes set on the horizon. Morning is coming.

*It’s been a long day, and you did your best
Let go of the past, it’s time now to rest
The weight of the world is getting too heavy
Give it to Jesus, His arms are steady*

*And your heart will feel lighter
Everything will be brighter
Find peace in knowing
That all will be well in the morning
In the morning
All will be well
All will be well in the morning⁹*

⁸ *In Over My Head (Crash over Me)*, Bethel Music, Jenn Johnson.

⁹ *In the Morning*, JJ Heller.