

Third Sunday of Easter (C/RCL)
First Holy Communion Weekend
John 21.1-19
April 22, 2007
Holy Trinity, Manasquan

The children wrote their first Holy Communion poem focusing on their five senses because they learned that in both sacraments, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, God's love comes to us through our sense of sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing. God made us and gave us these amazing bodies and their ability to **know the world** through our five senses. They are also the starting point for how we come to know God's love.

God meets us where we're at, and then takes us someplace else.... How about the Gospel story we just heard about the disciples having a crummy night fishing, ending up empty-handed at dawn, facing each other bleary-eyed, discouraged and hungry? The first three people St. John tells us were in that boat weren't exactly stars.... He mentions Simon Peter who had denied knowing Jesus three times the night before Jesus died. Next he lists "Thomas called the Twin" who said he wouldn't believe that his friends had seen the risen Lord unless he saw Him himself, and actually could put his finger in the nail marks of His hands and his hand in His side. The third person St. John mentions is "Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee" who, when his friend Philip told him early on that they had found the Messiah, asked, "Can anything good come out of Galilee?" (John 1.46) In a way, they were three losers, and the empty net trailing behind their boat proved the point.

On the surface of things, this was life at its most lack-luster, its dullest. For us, Cheerios in a bowl without even a banana to dress it up. William Sloane Coffin used to be the pastor at Riverside Church when I went to Union Seminary in New York City, and he had this to say about the scene:

...[W]hat could be more routine than the occasion on which Jesus last visits human beings – breakfast: fish and bread beside Lake Tiberias. Breakfast: the same food in the same place at the same time, with the same people, and all of them at their worst. (*Breakfast with Jesus*, May 6, 1979)

The scene before us could look pretty everyday and dull, too. I don't know about you, but I've **never** gone out to eat and ordered just bread and wine, or bread and grape juice.

Where's the excitement and joy in that??

Ah, but as Rev. Coffin has pointed out, there's no lack of **wonder** in this world, there's only the lack of a **sense** of wonder. He says,

...I'll stand by my description of breakfast as about as routine an event as you can find in the course of a day.

But breakfast with Jesus – that's like eggs benedict, or maybe Vermont maple syrup with fresh waffles. **It redeems the routine.**

Our children have learned that there is much more than meets the eye in this Lord's Supper, this "breakfast of champions," this "dinner of delights" (depending on the time of day you eat and drink it)... **Jesus' real presence** makes all the difference between what we see and what we get. Jesus meets us where we're at, then takes us someplace else. He redeems the routine.

Here's the wonder: there's still bread and wine and grape juice on the altar after the pastor blesses it and repeats Jesus' words, "This is My Body, given for you; do this for the remembrance of Me," and "This is the new covenant in My Blood, shed for you and for all people, for the forgiveness of sins; do this for the remembrance of Me." There's **still** bread and wine and grape juice on the altar, but we believe that **in, with and under** them we **also** have the Body and Blood of Christ.

How could **any** meal be boring, when Jesus serves it? When Jesus **is** it? Even if the disciples on that beach, long, long ago, had shared **only** bread with their Master Jesus, even if there had been no fish on the menu, they would have shared a holy communion with their Lord, because He was with them.... The children have learned that communion means being one with someone. In this **Lord's Supper**, this **Eucharist** for which we give thanks, we are in **Holy Communion** with Jesus and with one another and with **all** the saints who enjoy the **whole** feast in heaven while we enjoy a nibble and a sip of glory here below. Jesus meets us where we're at

and takes us someplace else. Or maybe it's that He transforms this place, any place, by His presence....

Where there is Jesus, there is **life, forgiveness and salvation**, creating more **joy** than we could ever hold! The children know that God's **love** translates into **life**: eternal life, begun in Holy Baptism, and extending beyond death and the grave. They know that earthly life is the prelude to another much vaster life. The children know that God's **love** translates into **forgiveness**: we sin, we make selfish choices, we do what we know is wrong, but God doesn't hold it against us forever, God sent the Son to save us. The children know that God's **love** translates into **salvation**: salve for our wounded souls, the healing of all hurts, including the ones that sin causes, the ones that would be the eternal death of us if it weren't for our Lord's death and resurrection.

Those gifts are for all of us: for Peter who three times denied his Lord, for Thomas who seriously doubted that Jesus would or could keep His promise to rise again, for Nathaniel who sarcastically asked if anything **good** could come from Nazareth, for our children receiving the Lord for the first time in this Holy Communion, blessed with an innate sense of wonder, and for those of us who have received Holy Communion countless times, who may come less often than we could because we underestimate the Gift that is given, who may come burdened with sorrows or doubts or disappointments, or who may come with joyful hearts because we understand that the Lord meets us **wherever** we're at, and takes us someplace else, that He redeems the routine and blesses us beyond words.

Welcome, all, to the Lord's Table. He welcomes you with joy, with open arms. He is the host of the meal and He **is** the meal. He calls you to come and to feast on love. Then He sends you out to invite others. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

