

“Fed By Jesus”  
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III  
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana  
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**John 21: 1-19**

In the movie “The Rookie,” Dennis Quaid plays the role of a high school teacher and baseball coach in a small town in Texas. In his youth, he had been drafted by a major league baseball team, and spent a few years in the minors as a pitcher. But injuries and bad luck put an end to his major league dreams. While coaching his team in Texas, he discovers that he can throw harder and faster than he did ten years earlier, and his team challenges him to tryout again professionally. The movie centers on his decisions, values, and the desire to follow one’s dreams, even when it may have seemed those dreams were out-of-reach.

One component of the story is his relationship with his father, which has been cool, at best. Quaid’s character harbors anger and resentment towards his retired military dad, the result of constant moves as a child, the divorce of his parents, and his dad’s unwillingness to recognize his passion for baseball. And yet, the son still seeks out his father’s advice and counsel, and it’s evident deep-down he yearns for his father’s approval and admiration.

At the end of the movie, Quaid’s character has just completed a terrific accomplishment. As he leaves the locker room, he sees his father standing off to the side. And in their conversation with one another, you witness the breadth of emotion of their life-long relationship. It is moving, powerful, and incredibly intimate. It concludes with these two stubborn men finally admitting their mistakes of the past, and there is a sense of looking to a new future in their father-son relationship.

There is something about intimate moments such as these which tell us an enormous amount about ourselves and one another. It might be two people finally revealing their true feelings about one another, and promising to spend their lives together. It might be a friend confessing a long-held secret to another friend, something which lifts a tremendous burden from his or her heart. It might be a moment shared in a small group, when friends in prayer or study promise to be supportive of one another no matter what befalls them. It is in these and other intimate moments of life when we discover the depth of our bonds with and for one another, and we come face-to-face with a force more powerful than any of us can comprehend.

Jesus offers such a moment when he walks along the beach and comes up to his friends in today’s gospel lesson. John says this is the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead, and there are just seven of them on this morning at the Sea of Galilee. The disciples do not know it is Jesus at first. It is only after he tells them where to cast their nets for fish and they see the overwhelming result that they know it is their

Lord. But in this intimate encounter with his friends, and his conversation with Simon Peter, we learn of the personal comfort, calling, and strength the risen Lord offers to all who would receive it.

Sarah Dylan Breuer writes: *The cultures in which the church was born were what anthropologists call “limited good” cultures. Every good – not just tangible resources, but anything of value – was perceived as being limited in quantity. (Coincidentally), they were also “agnostic” cultures.*

*Furthermore, there was no such thing as a “middle class” in the ancient Mediterranean. The work of a fisherman in the first century didn’t connote a tranquil vacation of enjoying simple pleasures of sun and sea as it does for some of us; the fishing life was one of constant anxiety, of wondering whether today’s catch would be enough to provide for all of the tariffs and fees owed to the richer and more powerful classes just for the chance to make a living. Those who have lived in such anxiety know how it can make everything in life come down to a single question: Will there be enough fish today?*

*All his life, before he first met Jesus, the central question in Peter’s life was “Will there be enough fish today for us to get by?” and each day he braved the waters knowing that his life and others’ depended on the answer to that question. Then he met the risen Jesus while fishing in the Galilee, and he had an experience of God’s abundance so powerful that, were the boat not close to shore, it would have been in danger of sinking. After a meal with this Jesus, the central question in Peter’s life shifted from “Can I gather enough fish for me and my family to get by?” to “Can I gather the fullness of the flock I am called to feed with the limitless blessings God has for us?”*

*All of us who think of what we own as earned, and of what the world’s children’s need as a burden too heavy to think about, all of us who wonder whether there’s room or love enough for us, all of us whose relationships are governed too often by a sense that what’s food in the world is limited and always the subject of competition, should keep our ears open to Jesus’ voice. Jesus is here, ready to receive us with limitless joy and to grant us limitless peace and joyful, eternal life. The real question, for those of us who have met him, is how we can gather enough friends, neighbors, and enemies to take in the abundance that God is offering* (“Unlimited Good,” *Christian Century*, April 3, 2007: 19).

There are times in the church when we become satisfied and comfortable. We assume that everything is being taken care of, and that someone else will respond to that pressing need being shared in worship, in the bulletin, or in the weekly email. We feel like our own spiritual needs are being met, and we don’t really need to try a new class or give our time to volunteer. We’ve got enough going on in our own busy lives; why should we upset our well-oiled routine? And then, there is the risen Jesus, standing before us, asking, “Do you love me? Feed my lambs.”

There are times in our community when we become overwhelmed with what surrounds us. One more murder, one more robbery, one more child, teenager, or young adult in trouble with the law – and we don’t know what we could do. Person after person coming to our door asking for help, asking for

assistance, asking, begging, asking – and we want to lock ourselves away, like the disciples did earlier in John’s Gospel, and forget all those needs are even there. It’s too much, God, it’s just too much. And then, there is the risen Jesus, standing before us, asking, “Do you love me? Tend my sheep.”

This past week, I visited our daughter, Erin, who is finishing her first year at Davidson College, near Charlotte, North Carolina. After dinner on Tuesday, I dropped her off for her orchestra rehearsal and went back to where I was staying while in Davidson. I turned on the television to watch the end of the national news, and instead it was the local news, with the bright, red banner “Breaking News” plastered at the top of the screen. Less than an hour earlier, not more than 20 miles from where I was standing, six college students had been shot, two fatally, at the campus of the University of North Carolina in Charlotte. Twenty miles away – another school shooting. One of the two students killed was the same age as Erin.

Such incidents of violence make me want to run away. They make me want to run and hide, and I want to shelter those I love by whatever means are necessary. I become overwhelmed by such mental illness and accessibility to firearms and what seems to be an ever-increasing number of such mass shootings. I just want to run and hide and protect those I love the most.

And there is the risen Jesus, standing before me, standing before us, asking, “Do you love me? Feed my sheep.”

When we are overwhelmed; when we are lost; when we are unsure as to what to do next; when we are comfortable and content – when we are in the midst of all that life brings, we are never alone. The risen Christ is with us. Our risen Lord is inviting us to try something new – cast our nets on a different side of the boat – and we are amazed by what takes place. Our risen Lord is waiting for us to come and share in the meal which he has prepared – (pointing to the communion table) this meal – and we are nourished for the journey before us. The risen Christ is nudging us, prodding us, challenging us to live out in our actions the love we profess for him.

Whether it is in the midst of our life at John Knox Presbyterian Church, or in our community of Indianapolis, or as a member of the human community in the United States and this world, Jesus is speaking to us intimately, personally, and passionately. He is there, in our sadness, in our comfort, in our confusion – and he welcomes us with guidance on what to do, and nourishment to give us strength. The risen Lord is with us, and he is asking us, “Do you love me? Feed my lambs, tend and feed my sheep.”

And when we are done being comforted, when we are done being strengthened, when we are done being uplifted – the risen Jesus doesn’t ask us if we love him. He tells us, “Follow me.”

May we do so, now and forever. Amen.