



SAMPLE SERMON:

THE BREAKFAST CLUB

KEY PASSAGE: JOHN 21:1-19

WRITTEN BY NANCY ROCK POTI, FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, RICHMOND, VA



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Nutritional studies and government statistics tell us that eating breakfast is the right way to start the day. Eating a good breakfast improves performance, mood and over-all health. A good breakfast really gets us going - it fuels us for the tasks ahead.

Well, I don't know why they had to spend so much money to study that. Mothers and fathers have been telling us that all along. "Come, and eat breakfast," they have called to us. They've served cereals, hot and cold; bacon, sausage, ham and eggs; toast, pancakes, pastries, waffles, and here in the south, pass the grits.

My dad cooked breakfast at times. He would break the eggs right into the pan and scramble them around until they were just right. Sometimes, I would get up early and make breakfast for the family when I was growing up. My specialty was canned fruit cocktail which I always served in pretty bowls. I was also good at fixing raisin bran cereal with lots of milk and some kind of coffee cake, usually made of Bisquick® and cinnamon and butter topping. My mom really put some time into our breakfasts when I was growing up. She used to make my favorite, gravy over bread. And what she couldn't do with pancakes! She was the queen of pancakes. She would make pancakes shaped like animals or the alphabet. Sometimes we'd be eating our own personalized pancakes – monogrammed. Then there were those delicious pancakes served early in the morning after our proms to us and all our friends. On each plate she would stack a few pancakes and surround them with plenty of whipped cream and top them off with fried apples. I swear, and this is the truth, I think that my mom wrote the recipe that Aunt Sarah's Pancake House uses. One of the more unusual favorites was pancakes with slices of hot dogs in them, which we called penny cakes, because that is what they looked like. Sometimes my mom would bone and soak salt herring and the next morning dip them in cornmeal and fry them up in a pan and serve them with biscuits that would melt in your mouth. Umm – fish and bread. What a great breakfast that was!

Now the food industry produces time saving breakfast bars, sandwiches, and drinks. There are frozen breakfasts for convenience and French toast and pancakes and waffles in boxes ready for the toaster. And for convenience, what about Pop tarts®? Many young people will tell you that toasted or not, those were what they lived off when they had early classes during their college days.

We've all gotten so busy. It is no wonder that fast food chains invite people to drive through and get their breakfast on the way to work. You can eat it with one hand.

I confess that there are times that I skip breakfast, but it's not because I really want to. I just get in such a hurry to get to the day's plans and work... but I know better. I like breakfast. In fact, I sometimes like breakfast for dinner. After a long hard day, who wouldn't be comforted by scrambled eggs and toast? It's quick and delicious.

Yes, most of us really love breakfast. And the truth of the matter is that breakfast is even better when someone else makes it for us. Or someone shares it with us. Some of my best memories are of being propped up against the pillows for breakfast in bed, or of meeting up for breakfast at a restaurant with friends or family, or of breakfast served up at my grandparents' house. Okay, so the toast was a little burnt and the smoke detector was serenading us throughout the "birthday breakfast in bed" that my little children fixed for me so long ago. And, I can tell you this, not a hectic Sunday morning goes by that I don't think about my grandmother singing in her "warble-y" off key way, "Shall We Gather at the River" or "Bringing in the Sheaves" as she prepared the most wonderful plate sized pancakes for us to drown in syrup before hustling us all off to the Church of the Brethren for Sunday School and church.

Doubtless, we all have breakfast stories to share. In our Gospel reading from the epilogue of John (John 21) the writer shares a breakfast story. By reading carefully, we see that this beautiful “breakfast story” not only tells us about the way we are all called to live in this world, but it also tells us something about those who are called from within the church to serve as leaders. In other words, the “some people” out of “all people.”

The disciples had been called to follow Jesus just three years before. Hadn't he told them that they would “fish for men,” and hadn't it been so? Crowds had come to hear him -- men, women and children -- to be touched by his healing grace, to hear the words he spoke of justice and peace, to be cared for and comforted by his mercy, to know his love for them. Yes, he led them like a shepherd leads his flock and had even told them that he was the good shepherd

After that first Easter, it must have seemed like that way of life, their following of Jesus, of hearing his voice day by day, had come to an end. They certainly hadn't expected all that had happened recently to have happened, even though he had told them that it would. He had shared the bread and wine with them and washed their feet and they just didn't realize that it was the last supper. Then Peter had denied that he knew him. Most of them had run away in fear, leaving only John and the women at the cross. It was all so hard to understand. They must have still had questions, doubts. Jesus was hard to recognize now. He would appear and then be gone.

What were they to do? They had left everything, but it seemed that they should return to their homes. They were in a period of flux asking, “What now?” “What next?” Some of them had already gone in other directions. A handful of disciples were back in Galilee.

As they waited by the sea once more, listening to the waves lap the shore, hopeful that Jesus would appear, Peter gave in to his restlessness and announced that he was going fishing. The others decided they would go, too. After all, they knew how to fish. It was what they had been doing when Jesus had called them. They had themselves and their families to provide for, and perhaps it really was time to “get on with it.”

Fishing wasn't easy work. This was no relaxing evening in the boat with hook and line. Rather, this was hard labor with heavy nets that calloused their hands and filled their noses with the foul odor of fish scales and brine. And to top it off, despite the fact that they had cast their nets many times, they were not catching anything.

Perhaps they were already getting hungry and remembered that time when they had told him, here near the sea, that the hour was late and that they should send the crowd away so that they could find themselves something to eat. How surprised they had been when he, who had asked them to “come and see” now told them to “go and see” about feeding the crowd. He insisted that they be responsible, that they did not need to send the people away. Instead, Jesus had compassion on the people and became the host of a picnic. All were miraculously fed from a generous boy's small lunch of barley loaves and fish which the disciples found and brought to him to bless. Bread and fish. Now that probably sounded so good on that long unproductive night in their boat.

Do you think that when the waves begin to get a little rougher, Peter was thinking about the time they all thought they were going to drown in rough seas? Do you think he was thinking about how he jumped out of the boat and just for a minute, just while his eyes were focused on his Lord, he had actually walked on water? Of how Jesus had lifted him out of the waves even as he sank into the billows? Or was he thinking back even further to another time when Jesus had asked him to lend him his boat – a time when he listened to Jesus speaking and came to know what Jesus was “about”? Was Peter remembering how he had agreed to be a part of Jesus' ministry? It had been after a similarly unproductive fishing expedition when Jesus told him to cast his net on the other side and he had obeyed.

Perhaps they were all thinking of how Jesus had taught them so much by his life among them. But it was over now and they were back fishing, not for men and women, boys and girls, but for fish. It was what they did. It had been their every day experience before, and they guessed that it would be their daily task again. Here they were -- feeling so empty, with empty nets to match. Seems that the only thing they might have caught were some memories of times past.

It was just about dawn. The beach was almost visible as day was breaking. At first they had to squint to make out the glowing embers of a fire. Then they smelled it. Or at least they thought they did! Who was that on the shore cooking up some fish? Boy, that really rubbed it in – they had no fish in their boat to feed their rumbling stomachs.

As if the man knew, he called out to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?”

When they confessed that he was right, he told them to try the right side of the boat and they would find some fish. Peter might have been fuming, “Yeah sure, Mr. Landlubber, tell us how to do our job!” But before he could even get it out of his mouth, the water on the right side of the boat was teeming with fish, glistening in the morning sun and filling the net to overflowing. Surely, then Peter remembered. It was too familiar for him to have not!

By now the disciple whom Jesus loved, was telling Peter that he recognized the voice. “It’s the Lord!” And Peter knew it was true. It was real.

This time, Peter did not call out across the water, “If it is you, Lord...,” instead he jumped into the water leaving the others behind to haul in the nets. He splashed and swam as fast as he could to the shore as the others rowed the boat in with their catch. Who would have believed that such a gloomy night of nothingness could turn out like this? There on the shore they found a fish fry for breakfast and Jesus was tending the fire. They didn’t need to ask who he was because they knew it was the Lord.

After Peter, at Jesus’ request, had added some of their catch to the fire, their beloved chef called to them, “Come, and have breakfast.” And he broke the bread and fish and gave it to them.

He was not serving them a supper of bread and wine in an upper room this time. He was nurturing them like mother and father all rolled into one and loving them with a hearty breakfast to get them started on a new day. It was their first meal together in a new life. It is nourishment for their bright new beginning.

This is not only a story about God’s love for us through Jesus, but also a story of our loving back. Of each of us returning that love. Of being called into a relationship with God.

When Peter was dried off and full to the brim Jesus called him aside and asked him, “Do you love me?”

Peter mumbled, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus responded, “Feed my lambs.”

And again Jesus asked, “Do you love me, Peter?”

And Peter, remembering the three times he denied his Lord, again said, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus responded, “Tend my sheep.”

A third time, Jesus asked, “Do you love me?”

And Peter said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”

Jesus responded, “Feed my sheep.”

Jesus reaffirmed Peter’s call to the ministry. He had asked Peter to reaffirm his own love for Jesus, once for each time that Peter had denied him. Jesus not only forgave Peter, but once again he asked Peter to follow him.

It is ironic that this time for Peter to follow really meant for him to lead. Peter was to begin again – caring for all people, teaching, praying, leading, serving, providing for their spiritual and physical needs. Peter knew what Jesus was asking him to do because Jesus had led him day by day and taught him how to live. Now he was called to be a servant leader, feeding the people both physically and spiritually, tending to their needs, both physically and spiritually. Now Peter was called into God’s ministry as his vocation.

What is your ministry? We are all given gifts to use. Each of us is called to follow, to love God and all of God’s people, to follow the way of Jesus. Every day. Whether we are young or young at heart. Every day. In little and big ways. Every day. As we try to bring about the upside down kingdom of God, working together as the church.

God’s call to us is a gift and it is our choice how we respond. There is no calling that is superior to another, for indeed, God’s plan for each of us is as unique as each of us. God knows each of us by name, knows everything about us, and calls us closer, inviting us into a relationship. And, if we are obedient to God’s call for us to follow, we truly are part of God’s kingdom advance.

Yet, some of us within the church are called individually to leadership roles. We are set apart but not above, to be servants of the servants of God. Could you be one of these whom God is calling to vocational ministry?

How does one know when God is calling one to vocational ministry? Let’s look back at the breakfast story once more.

To hear God’s call, one needs to listen to what is happening in one’s life. God calls in a variety of ways. Perhaps you, like Peter and the other disciples, have been following Jesus, learning his way, loving him with all your heart. Maybe someone has asked you to share in a ministry at church. Maybe as you learned more about God and about yourself you grew closer to God. Your call might be progressive, like Peter’s call. God calls in the unfolding of events, leading us with persistence, niggling at us to pay attention.

Perhaps you recognize the voice of God when you think about your every day experiences. Is someone pointing out the things you do well? Do your memories show you times of affirmation by others who recognize your gifts? Does examining your past show you ways that your life was shaped by God? Can you think of what it is in your life that you are passionate about? Is following and living your passion faithful to the way of God?

Peter was restless. He had doubts. He knew he wasn't perfect. He thought he was at a dead end. Yet, that dark night was really the start of a new day. Some hear God calling them in the long wait. God is at work even in times when God seems to be absent or distant.

Some feel closer to God and hear God's call to them in their own pain and suffering or in the suffering of the world. They draw closer to others and share the pain. Surely Peter and the disciples were grieving over all that had happened, even though Jesus had appeared to them resurrected. Their lives had changed. They didn't know what to do, or what would happen to them. But there they were, a handful of them, drawn together on that boat trying to find their way again. God works mysteriously in the circumstances and changes in our lives. Perhaps it will be in the struggle of change that you find the clarity of God's call to you.

Jesus asked that Peter add some of the new catch to the fish on the fire. It is the same with us. God provides abundantly, but we are to share in that abundance. God is present already and always in the process, asking us to listen and obey, asking us to be a part of the relationship of love with God. When we are called to vocational ministry we are called to add to the work of God and others who are part of God's work on this earth, joining with those who have gone before us.

We are nurtured and encouraged. We are called to trust God's leading. We can't really understand all of what that means. We can't know everything about the path we are called to walk. But we can know that we are never called to walk that path with all its twists and turns, its endings and beginnings, alone.

God is always calling. With each and every day we are at the dawning of God's purpose for our lives.

So we should eat a good breakfast. Feed our bodies and spirits with good food for the work we begin anew on each day that God gives us. Because after breakfast Jesus still is going to ask us:

“Do you love me?”

“Do you love me?”

And how we live each new day will be the only true answer. Amen.