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Reassurance at Breakfast

Jesus checks in with His friends

An Imaginative Interpretation

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(The image above is a photograph I took on the Galilee shore on New Year's Eve 2019. I hope to paint a morning depiction later.)

After Jesus' resurrection on the Sunday after Passover, that evening, He appeared to His disciples while they were gathered in a closed room in Jerusalem. It was AD 33, and the room was full of the voices of His friends – wondering, waiting, and questioning. There was so much news, so much to understand, so many emotions to process.

The women had told them about the angels' they had seen at the tomb who instructed them to tell the rest of the disciples that Jesus was risen from the dead! Peter and John were sharing how they had raced to the tomb and had seen the linen wrappings lying there. John said he had hesitated at the entrance to the tomb in shock by the absence of the body and the presence of the linens. Peter shared how he had gone past the entrance and had seen the facecloth mysteriously rolled up and separated from the other cloths.¹

As the disciples eagerly discussed the details of the events of the last few days, Cleopas and another disciple arrived in the room later in the evening. They had left early that Sunday morning for the village of Emmaus. Although it was a seven-mile walk, they returned hurriedly back to Jerusalem to share with the others that they had seen Jesus on the road and recognized Him when they broke bread together toward the end of the day. As they walked together, He had spoken about the necessity of His suffering, explaining the prophecies of Himself in the writings of Moses and the Prophets and all of Scripture.²

It was into this room of excited disciples that Jesus appeared, transformed before their eyes in indescribable newness. He said, "Shalom be with you! Just as the Father sent me, I also send you." Then, He breathed the Holy Spirit on them.³

The beloved Thomas was not there; he had refused to believe unless he could see and touch the scars in His Master's hands, feet and side. Eight days later, Thomas was in the room when Jesus appeared to them again. Jesus spoke directly to the weakest in faith, asking Thomas to touch His wounds, and reassuring him that He was the risen Messiah.⁴

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs..."⁵ One of the purposes of His reappearances was reflected years later in the words of His follower, the Apostle Paul, when he wrote to the Thessalonian Christians,

"For what thanks can we give to God for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you, as we keep praying earnestly night and day that we may see your faces, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?"⁶

Jesus earnestly wanted to see the faces of His beloved disciples after His sacrifice! He understood the trauma they had experienced the days before. Their presence brought Him great joy! They were the ones to whom He had said, "You are the ones who have stood by Me in My trials."⁷ They were His family

and His friends.⁸ He returned to them to strengthen whatever lacked in their faith and to reassure them of His love before He would then commission them to be His hands and feet in the world.

After Jesus' appearances during that first week, when the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread had come to an end,⁹ the disciples began their long journey home to Capernaum in the new energy of the Holy Spirit. There, He appeared to them a third time on the Galilee shore. This time, He addressed the spiritual need of Peter, and He strengthened the other six disciples who were there.

It was dawn. The disappointment of empty nets after a long night of fishing was all too familiar to these weary followers – Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, and John, and two others.¹⁰ Perplexed about the day ahead, the seven fishermen neared the shore. They were traumatized and overwhelmed by the recent events – the utter mutilation and slaughter of their Beloved Master, the news of His resurrection, and then His unearthly, beautiful appearances to them in Jerusalem! And now, it seemed like they were back at square one, yet with an uneasy anticipation. The quiet routine of the night fishing had been an unexpected reprieve.

A man standing on the beach asked if they had anything for Him to eat with His bread, and they told Him, “No.” Then, the man said, “Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find a catch.” John knew, “It is the Master!”

Once again, their nets were filled with an abundance of fish! Peter threw on his outer garment, jumped into the water and ran toward Jesus¹¹ as the others hauled the nets and brought the boats to shore. There Jesus was, sitting by a fire on the rocky beach in the dim coolness of the morning. “Come, have breakfast,” He invited. Out of breath and one by one, they all gathered around Him. No one spoke as He cooked the fish and broke the bread. They lingered in the silence of brotherhood as the flames flickered. Then, He turned toward Peter.

Peter's head bowed reflectively. Just before Jesus' execution, when the officers of the religious rulers had come by night to arrest Him, Peter had thought his time had come to fight for Him. So, he boldly lunged at the officer with his sword only to strike a blow to the ear of the slave standing by.¹² Peter remembered... he had had such strength and resolve to fight for His Master, only to crumble in denial after it seemed the whole plan had gone wrong. Jesus had turned to look at Peter at that very moment of his denial¹³ as Peter warmed himself by a fire outside the doors of the Sanhedrin where Jesus was being taken in chains.

Now, as Peter sat by the fire on the beach, the memory stung. Jesus looked at him, this time – risen, warm, serious, and smiling, His presence bringing healing, faith, and forgiveness to Peter's trauma, shame, and sorrow. Peter felt the sting and shame dissolve into acceptance and peace.

Weeks ago, Jesus had called Peter *Rock*. In Peter's estimation, He had not been a rock. But Jesus declared him to be *Rock* again and entrusted him with the high commission of feeding His sheep.

Sometime after their breakfast on the beach, the seven fishermen along with four more disciples “proceeded to a mountain in Galilee that Jesus had designated.”¹⁴ They climbed the stony slope to the summit that overlooked the Sea and waited. When Jesus arrived, they worshipped Him. Some embraced Him. Others lifted their hands, while a few bowed their faces to the ground at His feet. Jesus summoned them to sit with Him as he gave His instruction,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go, and make disciples of all the nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always to the end of the age.”¹⁵

“Feed My sheep. Make disciples. I am with you always.”

When they heard these words on the mountain top, it had been almost two weeks since they last sat with Jesus at the Passover Feast; they had stayed in Jerusalem for the rest of the Feast of Unleavened Bread before traveling four days back to Galilee to return to their fishing nets.

They would not see Him again until they returned to Jerusalem for the next pilgrimage Feast of Shavuot (Pentecost). There, "Gathering them together, Jesus commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised..." He said, "for John immersed with water but you will be immersed with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" ... and He said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth!" Then, He was lifted up and a cloud received Him out of their sight.¹⁶

The next time they will see Him will be with us when He returns for us in the clouds!

Our Father,

"Your words were found and I ate them,
And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart
For I have been called by Your name, Elohim, Yahweh Tsâbâ." (Lord of angelic armies)¹⁷

We draw near to You, our Shepherd, LORD of the armies of heaven! We embrace Your words and follow. Teach us Your ways. Feed us, O Bread of Life! We bring our pain, loneliness, joy, and gratitude to You! We worship You! We adore You!

¹ John 20

² Luke 24

³ John 20:22

⁴ See also Luke 24:33-53; John 20:24-29

⁵ Acts 1:3

⁶ 1 Thessalonians 3:10

⁷ See Luke 22:29-34

⁸ Matthew 12:46-50

⁹ Jesus was crucified at Passover. The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins the day after Passover and lasts for one week. It was one of three pilgrimage observances in which Jewish people would travel to Jerusalem to participate (see Leviticus 23). The disciples did the same along with Jesus Who became our Passover Lamb of Sacrifice.

¹⁰ John 21:1-3

¹¹ John 21:1-7

¹² John 18:10

¹³ Luke 22:61

¹⁴ Matthew 28:16. We wondered if this was Mount Arbel that overlooks the Sea of Galilee. We hiked there in January 2020.

¹⁵ Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ Acts 1:3-11

¹⁷ Jeremiah 15:16