

TEXT: John 21:1-19
THEME: Love feeds the betrayer
SUBJECT: Easter
TITLE: Naked and Afraid

Third Sunday of Easter
05 May 2019
Messiah Moravian
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The denominational official neglected to tell the newly ordained, 25 year old pastor, that the church in central North Carolina he had been sent to serve lost about half its members due to conflict. He had no idea how to handle the pain he discovered in that congregation.

He preached his best. He visited families in their homes. He visited people who stayed in the church and those who had left. He loved the people who told him he talked funny.

Then the anonymous notes and phone calls began. They were never directly threatening, but they were unsettling. Someone who was a part of the congregation was writing those letters. On the phone calls, someone would stay on the line, saying nothing.

The young pastor prayed, studied the letters and looked for a pattern. At one point he decided the source had to be the wife of one of the farmers in the congregation. During the conflict in the church, her husband had stopped attending worship, but Betty and her three adolescent children continued to come. She and one daughter taught a Sunday School class.

The pastor called Betty and asked if he could come for a visit. It was a warm, summer day when he knocked on the back door of the farmhouse. He and Betty sat together at her kitchen table, made small talk for a few minutes, and then the pastor told Betty he knew she had been making the phone calls and writing the anonymous letters.

As the pastor spoke those very words, he suddenly saw something he had missed. He saw another piece of the puzzle that made it impossible for Betty to have been the caller and the letter writer. But the words had been spoken, and they sat on the kitchen table between them. He braced himself for a storm to break over his head. He waited for Betty to promise she and her children would never darken the door of the church again.

Saul, breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, asked for and was granted arrest warrants for any disciples he could find. He had already witnessed the murder of Stephen, and was convinced this new ideology could be eliminated by force. En route, Saul suddenly sees something he missed. His murderous rage puts *him* in jeopardy.

No storm broke over the young pastor's head. Betty looked at him across the table, disappointment in her eyes and said, "No, pastor. I didn't make those phone calls or write those letters." They sat in the quiet of the kitchen for a moment. Then Betty said, "Pastor, would you like some sweet tea?"

"Yes, ma'am," he said. The sound of ice cubes falling into the glass, tea filling the glass, sacraments of grace. Conversation about family, the farm, weather, and the church, followed.

After a while, Betty walked with the pastor to the door and told him she would see him on Sunday.

Saul, terrified, hears a pained voice ask, “Why are you persecuting me?” God’s wrath may be short lived, as the Psalmist asserts, but it is still the wrath of God. I wonder what horrors Saul imagined? He is directed to enter the city and await further instruction. Education, enlightenment, not wrath, is what Saul receives.

Peter betrayed Jesus, abandoned him to his fate, and returned home to fish. Other disciples joined him. They fished all night without success. As they returned to shore, a voice instructs them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. It is a record catch. Someone recognizes the voice as that of Jesus.

Peter, naked, puts on clothes and jumps into the sea to swim/wade ashore. Why would Peter work naked and put on clothes to swim? Read as a report in the Jerusalem Post, this make little to no sense. Read as an allusion to the Garden of Eden, it makes a world of sense.

Adam and Eve betrayed God’s trust. In their betrayal they realize they are naked. When they hear the voice of God calling them in the cool of the evening, calling them to evening prayer, they become afraid and cover their shame with a fig leaf. Peter is clothing himself in a fig leaf to cover his betrayal.

Jesus, standing at a charcoal fire, fish roasting, bread baking, tells Peter to retrieve some of the fish he has just caught to add to the charcoal fire. The last time we saw Peter at a charcoal fire he was warming his hands and cursing at a young girl who identified him as one of the Galileans.

Peter had every reason to believe he would be “kicked out of the garden,” every reason to believe a storm would break over his head. Instead, Chef Jesus, talk about celebrity chefs, feeds him breakfast.

I wonder what went through Peter’s mind as Jesus hands him brick oven bread and roasted fish? Is Peter waiting for the hammer to fall? Is he able to taste the food? Is his stomach churning?

Breakfast finished, Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” Three times Jesus asks, “Do you love me?” Once for each time Peter denied knowing him. Peter is hurt! Peter is hurt? I wonder how Peter’s betrayal made Jesus feel?

Jesus’ response to Peter’s avowal of love is to command him to feed others *just as* Jesus fed him. Followers of the way of Jesus feed betrayers. Feed, not curse. Feed, not breathe murderous revenge. Feed, not condemn to the fires of hell. Feed.

Pastor, would you like some sweet tea?