

"It's better to give than to receive." A popular phrase, no doubt one that has motivated many people to look for ways to put it into action and discover the truth for themselves. A family gathers around the Christmas tree and Mom and Dad are most excited for their children to open their gifts because then they can see the big smile that comes, the honest look of surprise, the elation over something new. That matters more to them than their own gifts. Every once in awhile giving extends beyond the holidays - a neighbor is in need. Food and clothing stack up to be sent over in loving support. Your spouse has had a rough day on the job. A warm hug and a listening ear are in store. When there is obvious need, people usually come through to give in whatever way they can. And yet, there are so many times when we miss that opportunity to give. Jesus, on the other hand, is very good at giving gifts. Understatement. Jesus is not a holiday-only giver. Jesus is not a giver only at the outcry of trouble or trauma. Jesus is an everyday giver. Jesus keeps giving.

Jesus spent his entire life giving. In fact, he literally gave his life. He did so by dying on the cross, a brutal death where he paid for the sins of all. By rising from the grave, Jesus gave the greatest gift possible. Our Savior lives! We will too! Two weeks ago on Easter we celebrated that gift. Unlike some gifts that we receive which get left behind two weeks later, this gift of Jesus' resurrection is the one that truly keeps on giving. Jesus interacted with his disciples after he rose from the dead. Even when he had given them the greatest gift through his resurrection, life and salvation, he didn't stop giving. Jesus keeps giving, both to his disciples back then and to us today! There's going to be joy. There's going to be release from doubt. There's going preparation for the tasks ahead, plenty of purpose, and faith that is strengthened. Look for those gifts in this account as we go along and then look for those gift in your own lives because what John wrote down is relevant for us. The verse at the end of chapter 20, right before our account, tells us that all these things were written down so that by believing you may have life in Jesus' name. Now we'll see how it unfolds.

At this moment the disciples are living in the space between Jesus' resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit which was promised to them. Until that time they were playing the waiting game, and here we see them living out a pretty regular, ordinary day. At least that's how it starts. Peter gets the idea in his head to go fishing. The other disciples decide to go too. After all, for a number of them this was their profession. They were used to living life out on a boat. However, even with their combined experience as fishermen they did not see any success that night. Their nets did not bring up a single fish.

As soon as dawn breaks, Jesus appears there along the shore. The disciples in the boat are still a decent ways away and can't quite make out who is standing there at this point. Jesus calls out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?", a simple way to see how their efforts played out. When they answer "No" he says, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Seeing the flood of fish fill their net John responds, "It is the Lord!" His reaction from recognizing the power of Jesus is immediate. Who else could it be? It must be Jesus! Who else could turn a dismal outing into an astounding bounty?

Quickly after John's statement Peter reacts too. In typical fashion, he acts on instinct and makes his way to Jesus as fast as he can. "As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped

his outer garment around him and jumped into the water." See, Peter and Forrest Gump had a lot in common. From his boat Forrest sees Lieutenant Dan out on the dock, Peter sees Jesus standing on the shore, they both jump into the water clothes and all. It's really the same level of enthusiasm - Peter is honestly excited to see Jesus. There's no time for anything else. He grabs his coat and he is out the door, or in this case, he grabs his coat and he is overboard! Peter puts aside the great success, that giant catch of fish, so that he can go see his Lord. For all the times when we rag on Peter for saying the wrong thing or acting too soon before thinking, here I believe we can commend him for displaying his passion. Can you blame him for having this kind of passion? For a number of days he had thought that his Lord was taken away from him. It seemed like the grave would be the only place Peter could go to find him. But this was not the case! Jesus lives and he revealed himself to these disciples.

By the time Peter and the rest of the disciples in the boat reach the shore, Jesus has the breakfast layout all ready to go. There's bread available and a burning fire that he's started. Jesus calls for them to bring in the catch of fish. "So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn." The number of fish is recorded for us. Remember, these are large fish! We're told that the net held together and did not break. All these amazing details support the eye-witness account. John is careful to record even the tiniest details. He's interested in presenting the truth and the power of Jesus, so he gives us exact details and dialogue to back it up.

The dialogue even includes the simple phrase which Jesus said next. "Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." It's clear that Jesus was in no rush that morning. He really loves spending time with his people. He just gave a plain invitation, "Come and have breakfast." Just as important as what was said is what was not said. None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord." Countless other times the disciples were filled with questions like in the book of Acts... "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" They were often confused over what Jesus was talking about like when Jesus told them about his upcoming death and resurrection in the book of Mark... "But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it." But this time no one there felt the need to ask, they knew it was the Lord. The disciples recognized this man as Jesus, their risen Savior, just as he had predicted. What a blessing for those disciples to see Jesus again, to spend time with him, to receive gifts from him and to be showered with his care.

Jesus still gives invitations to join him, to sit at his feet and hear his Word, to eat a meal which he has prepared. How often do we take him up on his gracious offer? Or would we rather head out on our own? To hop in our boats and sail away with a plan thinking that we've got enough to make things happen since we have the skill, the experience, know-how. When those big plans that we've made fall through, our financial net breaks - sudden car repairs hit, the job market doesn't seem to have a place for us, our search for self-fulfillment comes up empty - a relationship fails after forgetting to keep God at the center, a friendship dissolves from bitterness and anger... does that make us more inclined to turn towards Jesus and dive in so that we can be in his presence all the sooner? Or does discouragement rule the day and block the light from shining through, the light where we can see Jesus as he truly is? He is our God and Savior. He calls us back to listen to his words of correction and take in his words of pardon. When we gather together to join in a meal at his communion table we receive that forgiveness, spiritual

nourishment that comes with the promise of strengthened faith. What a beautiful gift! Take full advantage of the ample opportunities God gives to you stemming from his everlasting love.

It's neat discovering how many parallels there are from John's account to our daily lives. Having seen the power of Jesus in the resurrection when he broke the chains of death and triumphed over sin, we recognize the work of Jesus in our lives. We don't need to ask, "Who is this?" By God's grace we know Jesus. We confess that he is the Lord. Jesus didn't stop giving after the resurrection. Jesus didn't stop giving once he had fed fish to his disciples there on the shore. Jesus keeps giving and continues to care for us and provide for our needs. Unless you work a third shift job, chances are you are not used to staying up overnight working, but just like the disciples were able to start their day with Jesus we can do exactly the same. We can begin each morning, gaze at each sunrise, and take that first sip of coffee with gratitude in our hearts for what Jesus has done to redeem us. It's another gift to pray, speaking to God and leaving our cares in his capable hands. It's another gift to read pages of the Bible that proclaim forgiveness through Christ. Make use of the good gifts that Jesus has given to you.

Recently, a member told me the most useful time to buy flowers and bring them to someone special. And it wasn't at any special event, or holiday, or birthday, anniversary. He suggested, "Because it's Monday." That will be the best. The disciples found themselves working through an ordinary day after Easter. They weren't expecting anything wonderful or amazing to happen to them. Maybe they felt disappointed when no fish came up in their nets. Jesus went to them, blessed their work, used his power, provided for their needs, and revealed himself to them to strengthen their faith. Not because of anything they had done for their Lord. He gave simply out of his great love. Maybe it was a Monday.

Jesus didn't leave his disciples to their own devices once he rose. Jesus doesn't pick and choose a select few days where he will come near us and bless us. Jesus keeps giving! He hasn't stopped. Thank him for the gift of good friends, for the peace and rest as you go to bed, for increasing your faith as you dig into the Word. Let yourself feel the joy of exclaiming in those moments - "It is the Lord!" Jesus keeps giving and he enables you to freely give too. Because you know him you can share the good news, Jesus sent for sinners one and all. Jesus lives! It's the gift that keeps on giving. Amen.