



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### ***A Bridge to a Banquet***

***John 21:1-14***

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The church is a building. The church is the people—the believers. The church is the body of Christ, continuing his ministry on earth. And, the church is a bridge: between people and God, between people's despair and eternal hope, between a just reality, and between today and the future....

Bridges...As a boy, on our way to Grandma's house, driving from Detroit to Chicago, not only could I never sit next to a door (because of my big brother and sister), but we couldn't eat the dinner my mom packed for us until we crossed the bridge in Ann Arbor. (Little did I realize I'd get to serve a church on that very same river). When we came to that bridge over the Huron River, we could eat our tuna fish egg salad sandwiches that she always made. As I was thinking about how Jesus is our bridge, I thought about that bridge in Ann Arbor. I thought about the tuna fish egg salad sandwiches, and that we were usually on our way to my Swedish Grandma's house, (my praying Grandma), and how she would have french dip sandwiches waiting for us when we got there late at night, through the Chicago holiday rush hour traffic. Half the time it was for Thanksgiving dinners with some of my aunts, uncles, and cousins—and that was a party!

Do you know the next bridge I thought of? The Zilwaukee Bridge. Anyone who's lived in the Detroit area for a while can remember the jokes about it. For years it struggled to get completed. For years it sat there half-done. For years it sat there, with some of those giant cement blocks tilting over. For years the finances to complete it were in question. It was during that time J.P. McCarthy thought it would make a great plant hanger. Every time we visited my folks near Traverse City, I would make my kids look at the view from the Zilwaukee Bridge. (You kids appreciate this!)

How many problems that bridge had reminds me of the many problems we have, as a church and as individuals in being that bridge for others. to come to know Christ through us. Like the Zilwaukee Bridge, for years we may simply not be connected. You may feel you don't connect with others. You may feel you're disconnected with God. But nevertheless God calls us as the church to strengthen our connections on both ends, with others and with the Lord. Reading the Bible, prayer, and worship can get us back in touch with God. Cultivating friendships, genuinely caring for others, serving others, and filling in the gap to help someone in need can bring us in touch with other people.

Like Zilwaukee, we simply may not put our resources behind strengthening our way toward God. Many of us love Jesus. The problem is, we let so many other things get in the way. We love Jesus, and we know that God is the most important One in our lives, but we let our priorities slip.

You may be here this morning with a lot to celebrate, but you're finding yourself wanting to go back to your old ways. You may be experiencing success in some form, but feeling like a failure. You may be trapped in negative thinking. You may think of yourself and all you've betrayed about what you want to believe in. Maybe you're carrying secret shame or failures? Let me assure you you're not alone. And, you're not beyond hope and help. Hear these words: *John 21:1-14*. *Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. He said, "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. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.*

I love this encounter. (Maybe because I love breakfast.) But really, this account of Jesus' resurrection is really an account of failure, shame, discouragement, and setbacks, and what God does about them. The disciples had run away when put to the test. Peter denied Jesus 3 times, rather than speaking the truth or even just walking away. (How many of us have compromised our witness like Peter?)

And then some stuff happened they couldn't explain. They knew the tomb was empty, and Jesus had risen. He was who He said He was. And now they're left with their guilt, failure, shame, discouragement, and setbacks, falling back into the only thing they knew how to do—catch fish. The world had changed. Jesus broke the stronghold of death and ushered in a new kingdom. The disciples were living in the new world, but they didn't know what to do, so they tried going their "old world" ways again. (Haven't you done that too? You know what you know, but still fall back to your old ways and coping strategies?)

We may feel as obscure as a place named Zilwaukee, wondering what big thing God can do through us. I used to wonder what God could ever do through a well-off suburban white kid. And I'll bet Peter wondered if God would ever work through him again, after having denied Jesus three times during his trial.

Think of Peter, that night of fishing. He had denied Jesus and eaten his words. Have you been "working all night" and "catching nothing?" Have you been working hard and coming up empty? Many of us are doing the right things, but there's something missing. We've been faithful, more or less, with our church involvement. We've shown up for work. We've contributed. But we've just been missing out. We've worked hard. We've even pulled our share of all-nighters. But we've caught nothing. What's wrong with us? Perhaps we're out in the boat without Jesus. Maybe it's time for us to come to the shore and let him serve us. And remember it wasn't until they admitted they had caught nothing that Jesus said "Throw your nets over the right side of the boat."

**Have you noticed that Jesus is always "ready for us?"** If you're here this morning and you think God's not ready for someone like you, you're in the right church. You need to know God cleans his fish after he catches them.

The smoke was rising on the shore, above the haze of the morning. The smell of smoked fish and fresh bread filled the disciples' senses.

Jesus had spread a table for his followers. That's the Kingdom of God. That's the resurrection! That's the kind of church that Jesus came to create! I don't know where we got the idea that we have to be so prim and proper. But anybody who reads the New Testament will discover a Jesus who loved to party with all kinds of left-out people. The publicans and 'sinners' loved him because he partied with them. The lepers of society found in him someone who would eat and drink with them. And while the solemnly pious could not relate to what he was about, those lonely people who usually didn't get invited to parties took to him with excitement. Our Jesus was and is the Lord of the party."

Whether that party is on the beach at dawn with smoked fish and fresh bread; or whether it is a Thanksgiving dinner; or a wedding feast; the fact remains that Jesus was calling his followers to join him there. Jesus' ministry on earth was basically walking around, healing and teaching, and eating in other people's houses. And while he was doing that, he was telling people "The Kingdom of God is here", and Jesus described it more like a great party than anything. God's love and truth and justice will permeate all our interactions. Imagine if your relationships were full of the will of God. God wants you to have strong, healthy, loving relationships. That is God's plan for you and for me. And as he proved in his resurrection, Jesus bridges that chasm.

Let me ask, are you on your way to a banquet? Are you on your way to a party? Often because of the media and our own false views of Christianity we think the party is in hell. Like that's where all the partiers go. The fact is, though, that

heaven is described as a party, a wedding feast, or a banquet. Heaven is the place where the love, joy, and peace are.

When Jesus reminded people that the “Kingdom of God” was breaking into history, he was also reminding us of what it’s going to be like. Jesus was fulfilling what was written in the Old Testament.

Once a year, according to Deuteronomy 14, all the people of God were to bring one-tenth of all their earnings to the temple in Jerusalem. Some of the offering was in animals. Some was in grain. And for those who couldn’t haul it that far, they exchanged it for money. Imagine one-tenth of Israel’s Gross National Product! Listen to what it was used for: *“You shall eat before the Lord thy God that you may learn to fear the Lord. You shall rejoice, you and your whole house.”* The giving was for banquets and festivals and all the official religious parties of the Israelites! No one said “Church is boring.” The celebration on Mount Zion was anything but. There was lots of food and plenty to drink. There was dancing, singing, and exuberant celebration. Everybody was invited, from widows, to poor kids, to prostitutes and tax collectors. The partying was about the Kingdom of God. It was a foretaste of what heaven is going to be like.

You and I need to be on our way to a banquet – to that banquet. You and I need to be on the bridge to that banquet. But you and I also need to be that bridge for others, like the Ann Arbor bridge on the way to Grandma’s house. Jesus said *“Come and have breakfast.”* Those are some of the best words to my ears. “Come.” Throughout the Bible God is calling us, seeking us, and telling us to come and join him. God always takes the initiative. God is a seeking God. The first time God used that word was in Genesis, inviting Noah to join him in the ark (Gen. 7:11). And in the last chapter of Revelation 22:17 he uses it twice. *“The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”* Let His invitation be to you today. He says come—come on—with me! It takes away all the distance. He’s inviting everyone to the banquet. And He’s the one who takes away sin and sadness. Let go of your painful memories

It’s just you and God. You and God both know what you’ve done. And neither one of you is proud of it. What do you do? Stand in his sight. Stand still and wait. Sometimes that’s all a soul can do. Too sorry and repentant to speak, but too hopeful to leave—we just stand.

You might try what Peter did. Stand in God’s presence. Stand amazed. Jesus has come back. He invites you to try again. This time, with Him. It’s an encounter every person needs to have with Jesus. Church, our call is to give people every opportunity to get caught. To allow ourselves to get caught.

Church where are we in this account?

We are the boat, helping some people stay afloat, or finding purpose.

We are the net, catching people, bringing people in to encounter Jesus.

We are the fire, providing warmth and a meal.

We are the words of Jesus, offering hope and forgiveness.

We are the disciples, needing to run to Jesus ourselves, for nourishment. We need to find and we need to be...a bridge to a banquet.

And when we do, we realize that Jesus is waiting, breakfast is on, and we know that things will never be the same for us again. Amen.