



## The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

### Sermon: Year C – Third Sunday of Easter – May 5, 2019: The Mensa Christi

The Bible is full of wonderful stories that are not only rich in images, but also rich in the messages that those stories convey, especially through the words of Jesus.

You've got the Prodigal Son, the Feeding of the Five Thousand, the Resurrection from the Tomb, the Revealing of Jesus to Mary Magdalene in the Garden and many, many more. I'm sure you all have your favorite. I know I do.

And the Holy Land, where I've been twice, is rich in places that have profound spiritual energy and where you can feel the presence of God and enter into the story of Jesus in a way that's raw and in a way that's real.

There is the birthplace of the Christ child in Bethlehem, there's the site of the Annunciation in Nazareth, there's the Mount of the Temptation in the desert of Jericho.

But for me personally, nowhere does a place and a story converge into spiritual transformation for me in the Holy Land as the site in today's Gospel and the story that takes place there, my favorite story and my favorite place. I'm talking about the Mensa Christi on the Sea of Galilee, Mensa Christi meaning the Table of Christ where Jesus prepares a meal of broiled fish for the disciples after he resurrects from the tomb.



But let me go back a little bit.

You'll notice in this story that there is a charcoal fire by which Jesus stands and broils the fish for Peter and the other disciples in the boat, a charcoal fire where he stands with Peter and says, "Come and have breakfast."

But this is not the first charcoal fire we hear about in the Gospel. It's not the first. It's not the only one.

There's another charcoal fire in the Gospel of Jesus, also in the Gospel of John—at the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest, the house and the place where Peter denies Jesus. He's warming himself by a charcoal fire and a servant girl comes up to him and says that he knows Jesus and Peter denies it.

The Gospel says:

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*Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.*

Peter's Denial takes place by a charcoal fire.

And then after his denial of Jesus, we have the sentencing of Jesus, his walk along the Via Dolorosa, his crucifixion, and his death on the cross. Then we have his burial in the tomb and the resurrection. All the while, Peter flees back to his home in Galilee where he's hiding out and where he goes back to his life of fishing. and then we have this story at the Mensa Christi on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus stands by another charcoal fire and welcomes Peter to shore; where he swims in, swims in naked, from his fishing boat.

The Mensa Christi is stunningly beautiful, especially at sunset, the time of day that I visited this very special place. The shores are rocky—not full of sand, but of small rocks and pebbles that crunch beneath your feet as you walk toward the water that laps gently on the shore and makes the sound of high-pitched piano keys as it invites and welcomes you to the shore of Galilee and into this story. I stood on that shore and looked out on those calm, glassy waters and knew that something very special had happened there. And then behind me there was a small chapel built over a flat rock—that flat rock being the table where Jesus offered this meal to Peter; a meal that took place by a charcoal fire.

And we bear in mind that this is the place where Jesus forgave Peter—he didn't forget, he didn't excuse, but he forgave, releasing Peter from any sense of blame for denying him, for not being with him as he died on the cross. And from this place Jesus sent Peter forth to build the church, the church being the people of God. Jesus says:

Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.

The church is born.

When we were at this site, we were with a group of bishops from the Anglican Church in Canada who were part of our pilgrimage. And after we had listened to this Gospel reading, one of them said to me, "I don't know why we worry about building churches with bricks and wood. I don't even know why we make buildings at all. The only thing you need to build a church is a charcoal fire." I'll never forget those words.

And as I think on it, I realized that the story of Peter and Jesus is bookended by charcoal fires—one at the denial and one right here. At one fire there is denial, and at the other there is forgiveness; and it's from that place of forgiveness that Jesus calls Peter to build his church.

And then we fast-forward two thousand years and here we are in this church building, this cathedral sanctuary. Where is our charcoal fire? And what have we done by that fire? What grievous things have we done against Christ? And what are the parts of our lives where we've been forgiven? Forgiven by others and forgiven by God?

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And from that charcoal fire in our inner hearts, what do we do to move forward by forgiving—to stop blaming, and to move on toward the Christ light that is that charcoal fire burning in our hearts?

The answer is going to be different for each of us. But the fire is the same, because the source is the same. The source is Jesus, the source is light, the source is forgiveness, the source is redemption, the source is compassion, the source is kindness, the source is love.

So, yes, there are many stories in the Bible that are not only rich in images, but also rich in the messages that they convey, especially through the words of Jesus.

So, yes, the Holy Land, is rich in places that have a profound spiritual energy where you can feel the presence of God and enter into the story of Jesus in a way that's raw and in a way that's real.

But this place and this story, for me, is unique. It's unique because it has one very special quality, and that one and very special quality, for me, is a sense and a feeling of peace, peace through forgiveness, peace in the presence of Jesus, peace by the charcoal fire.

What is that place for each of you? I don't know. But I pray that this Eucharist will help you find it and that you will embrace it and that you will sit by the warmth of its fire and know that you are loved, the way that I knew that I was loved when I sat on the shores of this special and peaceful place.

*When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come."*

And it all took place, took place by that charcoal fire.

*Amen.*