

## There on the shore stood Jesus, and it was morning

John Dear | Mar. 25, 2008 On the Road to Peace

After pondering the arrest, trial, torture and execution of Jesus this past Holy Week, and the ongoing crucifixion of Christ in the world's poor, in the people of Iraq, in our torture chambers, death rows and nuclear silos, I find the Easter texts announcing the resurrection of the nonviolent Jesus full of amazing hope and boundless new energy. In particular, I love that beautiful sentence from John 21, describing one of those first Easter encounters, a kind of Zen scene of perfect mindfulness that opens up new peace and life within us: "There on the shore stood Jesus, and it was morning."

He's alive, healed, mindful, centered and peaceful, standing there along the shore as the sun rises over the beautiful Sea of Galilee. He's still gentle, loving, forgiving and nonviolent. He hasn't changed. He's not a triumphant judge, come to condemn the disciples or the rest of us. There's no anger, resentment, retaliation, or vengeance. There's no argument, no "I told you so," no condemnations. Instead, he makes breakfast for the disciples. We move from the Last Supper to the First Breakfast!

If any of us had been through such a horrific ordeal -- betrayal, denial, arrest, torture, execution and resurrection -- would our first task be to make breakfast for the friends who had abandoned us? Most of us would probably not even come back!

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His friends are out on at sea, exhausted from working all night and catching nothing. They hear someone call out, suggesting they throw their nets in the other direction. They make a huge catch, recognize him, and rush to the shore, overcome, overwhelmed, astounded, speechless. "Come, have breakfast," he says. He serves them and they sit around the charcoal fire in silence, looking at him, saying nothing, enjoying the new day. A perfect Zen moment, the present moment of peace, the Eschaton, with Jesus fully alive and the disciples coming to life. In contrast to the violence of the world -- from Hiroshima to Vietnam to Iraq, from the Pentagon to Livermore Labs to Los Alamos -- here we have a scene of quintessential peace -- "peace on earth," the God of peace at peace with his friends, enjoying a picnic by the shore.

But as usual, the Gospel doesn't leave it there. The nonviolent Jesus shortly gets down to business. His friend Simon Peter had only days before denied three times knowing Jesus. Simon Peter had warmed his hands over the charcoal fire in the imperial Roman courtyard while Jesus was tried and tortured inside. Yet now, we are told, Jesus has built his own charcoal fire. Simon Peter now warms himself and enjoys breakfast in the courtyard of peace of the nonviolent Jesus. The setting is warm, friendly, intimate and comes with an invitation.

In contrast to the imperial courtyard where Simon Peter denied knowing Jesus three times, Simon Peter is given three opportunities to redeem himself in the courtyard of peace. If we were there, we might get mad at Simon Peter, express our hurt and bewilderment, demand to know why, and beg for Simon Peter's apology. But the risen Jesus, nonviolent as usual, goes right to the heart of the matter. "Do you love me?" he asks Simon Peter.

In 1985, I heard Henri Nouwen give a one and a half hour sermon on this text. This is the most important question of the Bible, Henri insisted. God asks each one of us: "Do you love? Do you love me? Do you truly love me?" This question requires weeks, months and years of reflection (as I wrote in my book, *The Questions of Jesus*).

Here Jesus reveals his need for friendship, love, and commitment. He vulnerably opens his heart. But in the original Greek, we notice that Jesus invites Simon Peter not just to profess love, but *agape*, "unconditional, sacrificial, nonviolent love." The question is: "Do you *agape* me?" Alas, Simon Peter's answer, we also note in the Greek, falls short. "Yes, I *philia* you, Jesus," he says. *Phila* is the Greek word for "limited love," the love for relatives, friends, and neighbors, as opposed to *agape*, the "unlimited," universal love of Christ. Simon Peter doesn't quite get it, so Jesus asks him again, and again. Alas Simon Peter never offers *agape*. He tries, and so we can.

After each response, Jesus gives him a mission. "Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep." If you love me, he says, then serve my people. In the Greek, the word for "lambs," *martiros*, connotes both "martyrs" and "witnesses."

There, after that exchange, at the end of the story, for the first time in John's Gospel, after everything Simon Peter has been through -- all the journeys, healings, confrontations, civil disobedience, after the arrest, execution and resurrection of Jesus -- now, in this place, Simon Peter is called to discipleship. The journey, he learns, is just beginning!

"When you were younger, you dressed yourself and did what you please. Now someone will put a belt around you and lead you where you would rather not go. Follow me."

Dear Simon Peter, Jesus says, if you really love me, follow me on the road to peace. Now it's your turn to walk to Jerusalem, Rome, Washington, to resist empire and announce God's reign of peace. Practice my way, truth, and life of loving nonviolence. Take a stand against war, poverty, nuclear weapons and the culture of death. You too will be arrested, jailed, tried, tortured and killed. You too will rise and live in my reign of peace."

Peter must have been surprised and shocked. So are we. Too often we think that we've done everything we could. We lived a good life, gave it a good try. We said our prayers, did good deeds, tried to take a stand. We've watched presidents come and go, wars heat up and end, weapons be built and used, corruption reach unimaginable heights, even the weather threatened by our greed. We're older, tired, and ready to slow down. Just at that moment, when we think we've seen it all, we're called to follow the nonviolent Jesus, like Simon Peter, for the first time.

Easter is the time to begin again, to take up the journey of peace and nonviolence in the footsteps of the risen

Jesus. The Gospel suggests that if we truly love Jesus, then we will do whatever he asks, even live as he lived, give as he gave, love as he loved, serve as he served, disarm as he disarmed, resist empire as he resisted empire, and die with compassion and forgiveness as he did. Like Simon Peter, we start all over and follow him -- even to where we would rather not go.

The 40 days of Easter are a good time to taste the new life of resurrection peace, to center ourselves in resurrection peace and to begin again the journey of discipleship in resurrection peace. We imagine the risen Jesus standing alone at dawn on the shore, share that intimate breakfast with him, see his wounds, receive his gift of peace, tell him we love him and hear his call to follow. These beautiful Easter days can resurrect the spirit of hope, life and nonviolence within us, so that like Simon Peter, we too can be transformed and share that resurrection peace to a world of war, poverty and empire.

If Jesus is not risen, St. Paul says, we are fools. But if he is risen, then God has affirmed his nonviolence, called us to practice his nonviolence, guaranteed our survival, and summoned us to give our lives for justice and peace.

"I shall die, but that is all I shall do for death," the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote. From now on, we have nothing to do with death and the culture of death. We resist death, live life to the full and go forward in hope with his gift of peace.

Easter invites us to spend our lives breathing in the spirit of resurrection peace, becoming people of resurrection nonviolence, sharing resurrection *agape*, manifesting resurrection forgiveness, speaking resurrection peace to the world, and embarking anew on the path of life with the risen Jesus. In response, we learn a new vocabulary, beginning with that great ancient Christian word: "Alleluia!"

John Dear's books on Jesus, *Transfiguration*, *The Questions of Jesus*, and *Jesus the Rebel*, are available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) [1]. The DVD, "The Narrow Path," with John's reflections on Gospel nonviolence, is available from [www.sandamianofoundation.org](http://www.sandamianofoundation.org) [2]. Next month, he will speak in Erie, Penn., Sioux Falls, S.D., Fond du Lac, Wis., San Jose, Calif., and Indianapolis, Ind. For info, see: [www.johndear.org](http://www.johndear.org) [3].

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