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A Future Gathered Around The Lamb

I love being an early riser, although a few times in my life I have attempted to be a night owl. Peer pressure. It never worked out. I remember in college telling someone I would make sure I was in bed by midnight, trying to fit in. That's late, right?

In college, a few times I thought I would try to stay up late working on papers and other assignments. As the sun would set and darkness would cover the night sky, my word document would remain blank. Nothing there. Eventually I would admit defeat and go to bed. Things would be different at daybreak.

The disciples had spent all night working. Being productive. They knew what they were doing. We all know sometimes that isn't enough. As hints of dawn began to flicker in the east their nets were still empty. With them they too were depleted. Deflated. Defeated. They went back to this because the person they thought was their savior was nowhere to be found. Embarased. Empty nets and more. Who among us hasn't been there?

We know that empty nets can weigh more than full ones. We carry them on our shoulders everywhere we go. I don't know what kind of empty nets have attached themselves to you after nights of failure. Maybe you worked hard to reconcile with someone else after a conflict only to be met with no movement from the other person. Or you did everything you could to pass on the faith to your child or grandchild but now it seems like it had the opposite effect.

It could be that you climbed the ladder of success as high as it would go. Sacrificing things along the way, because you thought that long nights and weekends away would pay off in the end. That's what we are told. That's not how it worked out for you. Lying awake, tossing and turning you are left with empty nets. Nothing to show for it.

However those empty nets intertwine with your life, we know what they catch us up into. Shame, guilt, regret, anger, resignation. Like knots they keep us stuck. Make us smaller.

There was something about his presence. He told them to let down their nets again but this time on the other side. Suddenly there were so many fish they could not haul it all in. It was too much. In surprising abundance and gift they recognized that it was him. The risen Christ, on the move, always finds his way to us. It's just what he does. Especially when we are at the end of ourselves. Behind locked doors. After a night that produces nothing. Amid dead ends. When fear and failure intermingle. Where shame wraps itself around you.

It was at the Starbucks on the corner of Chicago and Franklin over a decade ago. In a soft spoken southern accent he shared his call to ministry. He was an openly gay pastor, living with his husband and their dog. His testimony was like an invitation to put down my nets on the other side. I couldn't risk it yet. I had spent so long closeted, afraid of others, and my own shadow. It was easy to fish over there, even though I kept coming up empty. It's what I knew. Things could never change, and the nights dragged on. The future was scary.

Slowly, I realized that I had encountered the risen Christ that day through my friend Trey. When I put down my nets on the other side I discovered that God's grace is like that miraculous catch of fish. Capacious grace is God's constant gift. For me and you. God in Christ always gives us more than we could imagine. 153 fish and then some. Life on the other side of every death. A future shaped by promise. In this deep water no past will have the last word and no present will last forever. In whose face or voice have you recognized the risen one? Nets full of grace are somehow lighter than the empty ones.

After breakfast they are around a charcoal fire. Like the fire that burned the night he betrayed Jesus. Empty nets and more. This time, as one preacher put it "Peter's shame meets Jesus' grace, and Jesus' grace wins." For Peter, so for you.

In a few minutes, we will gather on our own beach. On the shores of the ocean of mercy, around our Easter flame. There we recognize the risen Christ in Kell, Ruby, and Vivianne as they are joined to his own death and resurrection. Clothed with Christ. The light of Christ placed in their hands and the cross traced on their brow. They will be made beloved children of God- a name that no one can erase. Filled with all that God could ever give. Nets full of mercy. Come to this table, drop your nets to the other side. Receive instead of take. Stretch out your hand. The risen Christ is here. The fullness of God for you. No strings attached.

The risen Christ is here, southern accent or not. Let your heart recognize his voice speaking to you. God sees you in the deep dark midnight And is by your side. God remembers you. Hears your cry. Will never let you go. Is always there to catch you. You are held in the wide and spacious net of God's love. You will never be lost. There is always a tomorrow for you. Like Christ, you were dead and are alive again. Let's follow Jesus, Kell, Ruby, Vivianne, Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, James, John, each other, into God's future. It's about daybreak. Surprising gifts abound there.