Breakfast with Jesus
John 21:1–19

The Five Senses and Memory

Our memories aren't just stored in our minds—they live in our whole bodies. It's often through our five senses that certain memories come back to us. A smell, a taste, a sound—these can suddenly transport us to another time and place. What comes to mind when you smell freshly cut grass? For me, it takes me back to my military service—working under the blazing summer sun, pulling weeds as sweat poured down my back.

And what about the musty smell of mold? When I catch that scent, I remember the basement prayer room at my home church. Even in the middle of summer, it was always cool down there—but always damp. That moldy smell was constant. And yet, strangely, I kind of liked it. It was the smell of a sacred space. You see, pleasant smells don't always bring happy memories, and unpleasant smells don't always bring bad ones.

What I want to share is this: our senses—smells, tastes, textures, sounds—often help us recall moments in our lives, sometimes moments we've long forgotten. If we look closely at today's passage, we find many of those sensory cues. Sounds, smells, tastes, scenes—all of them full of memory and meaning.

In verse 1, we're told that Jesus appeared again to His disciples, this time by the Sea of Tiberias. That's another name for the Sea of Galilee. For Peter, James, and John, this was home. They were fishermen here. Imagine Peter catching the familiar scent of the lake again.
The sound of the waves, the crisp air, the smell of the fishing nets—it must have brought back a flood of memories. He may have remembered the days he spent on those waters with his father and brothers. Life wasn't easy, but it was familiar. He worked with his hands. He supported his family. Maybe it was those memories stirring again that led Peter to say, "I'm going out to fish." The others joined him.

They worked all night, casting their nets, hauling them in—again and again. But by the time the sun began to rise, they hadn't caught a single fish. Can you imagine how Peter felt? All that effort. All that work. And nothing to show for it. And maybe—just maybe—that moment brought back another memory. One he couldn't avoid, even if he wanted to. A memory of the first time he met Jesus. A moment that had changed his life.

As Peter wrestled with his thoughts, a voice rang out from the shore. "Children, haven't you caught anything?" "No," they answered. Then the man said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat. You'll find some there." And when they did, the net was so full they couldn't even haul it in. It was then that John turned to Peter and said, "It's the Lord."

The Unmistakable Scent of Charcoal

When the disciples came ashore, they found that Jesus had already built a charcoal fire. On it were fish and some bread. Have you ever smelled charcoal or the gentle aroma of burning wood? What kinds of memories come to mind? For me, it brings back the last night of youth summer retreats—gathering around a campfire, roasting sweet potatoes. For me, the smell of burning wood is tied to good memories.

But what kind of memory did that charcoal fire bring back for Peter? For him, it may have stirred the one memory he most wanted to forget—the one that brought the deepest shame. In John 18, Jesus is arrested and taken to the high priest's courtyard. Peter follows at a distance, just to see what would happen. Verse 18 says, "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." And then it happens. Someone asks Peter, "Aren't you one of his disciples?" And Peter denies it—not once, not twice, but three times.

The sweet smell of that charcoal fire would never be the same for him again. It was no longer just the scent of warmth—it was the smell of failure. The night he denied Jesus. The night he denied himself. A memory he couldn't erase. A wound that still lingered.

We all carry something like that with us, don't we? A memory we'd rather not face. A mistake, a broken relationship, a word we can't take back. A moment of failure that quietly follows us. A smell, a place, a phrase—something that brings it all rushing back.

But here's the beauty of today's story: Jesus meets Peter right there. Not away from that memory, but in it. Not avoiding it, but stepping directly into it. And Jesus does the same for us. Right at the fire of our failures, he meets us again. Not to shame us, but to restore us. Not to judge, but to begin again. Jesus takes the scent of failure—and turns it into the fragrance of grace. And he still does.

Jesus came to the very place Peter most wanted to avoid—the place of his deepest regret. And there, Jesus quietly prepared breakfast and waited for him. He didn't scold. He didn't confront. He simply said, "Come and have breakfast."

When I picture this scene, I think of a parent preparing a warm meal for a discouraged child. No lectures. No questions like, "What were you thinking?" or "Why did you do that?" Just a quiet bowl of soup and a plate of rice, offered without a word. That meal says everything: "You are still my son. You are still my daughter." "Even in your failure, I still love you." That table becomes a place of welcome—a place where healing begins.

Jesus did the same. He built a charcoal fire, cooked fish and bread, and welcomed the disciples. Without saying much, He made it clear: "Come and eat." "I still love you." The risen Lord still comes to us. And when we meet Him, the places of our failure and despair can become places of hope— places where new purpose begins.

There's a church in Kansas—the largest United Methodist church in the country—called the Church of the Resurrection. It's led by Pastor Adam Hamilton and has over 24,000 members. But do you know where it began? In a funeral home. Starting a church in a funeral home might seem strange. Most people would hesitate to worship in a space so closely tied to death. But from that place, Resurrection Church grew into a community that saves souls and brings healing to the broken.

It reminds me of the early church during the Roman persecutions. Back then, believers gathered in the catacombs—underground tombs filled with the bones of the dead. They worshiped in places that smelled like death. But it didn't matter. Why? Because they believed in the risen Christ who had overcome death. And those who had encountered the hope of the resurrection were no longer afraid. They lived boldly, carrying out the mission Jesus had given them. Why were they so bold? Because they knew one truth deep in their bones: Jesus comes to us. He comes not just in moments of triumph, but in moments of fear, failure, and death itself. And the same Jesus who met the early church in the catacombs also met His own disciples in their darkest hour.

Jesus comes to us!

Jesus came to the very disciples who had abandoned Him. He came to Peter—the one who denied Him three times, saying, "I don't even know the man." And what did Jesus say?

“Come, have breakfast.” He didn’t bring up the past. He didn’t say, “Let’s talk about what you did.” Instead, He invited them back into their calling. He gave them love—not guilt. He gave them purpose—not punishment.

And Jesus comes to us the same way. With the same love. And when we truly receive that love, it changes who we are. There’s a pastor who went on a short-term mission trip to Haiti. As you know, Haiti is a place of deep poverty and hardship. While serving there—helping to build a water tank—he came across a little book of prayers written by children. One prayer stood out. A child had written: “God, I’ve lived like a weed. But one day, You pulled me up and planted me in Your garden. And now, I’ve become a flower.”

That’s what the love of Jesus does. It transforms us. It turned Peter from a man of fear into a man of courage. It changed the apostles from doubters into bold witnesses. And that same love still transforms us today.

My beloved Asbury family, We all carry memories we’d rather forget— failures, regrets, broken relationships, words we wish we could take back. But the gospel tells us something beautiful: The risen Christ comes first—to the very place we want to avoid. And He says gently, “Come, have breakfast.” That one quiet invitation lifts us up again. It’s not a word of blame, but a word of welcome. Not a judgment, but a call— a call into deeper love and renewed purpose. May we hear that voice today and respond with all our hearts: “Lord, You know that I love You.” Amen.