



CHURCH of  
the SAVIOUR

2537 Lee Road  
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118-4136  
Telephone: 216-321-8880  
Website: [www.COTSumc.org](http://www.COTSumc.org)

## “Breakfast with Jesus”

April 24, 2022

John 21:1-19

Rev. Andy Call, Lead Pastor

Something is off.

I feel it. My kids feel it. My clergy friends feel it. And I’m pretty sure you feel it, too. The mood is different. The feelings aren’t the same. To use a trending phrase, *the vibe has shifted*. “Vibe shift” is a term coined by trend-forecaster Sean Monahan<sup>1</sup> to describe when a social trend or construct fades away and is replaced by something else. Monahan talks about vibe shifts in relation to fashion, music, and pop culture. But lately, we’ve sensed another kind of vibe shift – a really big one.

That shouldn’t be surprising to us. We’ve spent the last two years living through a pandemic that fundamentally changed the way we interact with the world and forever reshaped our lives. The pandemic brought about the end of many relationships, debilitating isolation and loneliness, people leaving their jobs, and the painful loss of the millions of people who didn’t even survive it. Things won’t simply go back to the way they were, even if we wanted them to.

Elamin Abdelmehmoud, a culture writer for BuzzFeed News, says there came a point when it became impossible not to notice the vibe shift. So many things changed – really big, major things – each with a before and an after. And the cumulative effect of all those before and afters bring us to very uncertain ground. We’re no longer sure of the rules that govern our engagement with each other or the world around us.

This is more than just a feeling. The changes we’ve experienced in just the last few years have sent shockwaves through all our lives. Abdelmehmoud eloquently describes our collective experience this way:

Two years after the start of a global pandemic that has killed millions around the world and nearly a million in the US and upended the lives of everyone on the planet, we find ourselves at a crossroads at every level of our lives. On a personal level, our friendships have been reordered. On a national level, technology has accelerated a complete breakdown in trust of institutions that once served to keep us together. Globally, a war in Ukraine has exposed the fragility of the rules-based order. Meanwhile, the collective reluctant action to fight the climate crisis has deepened instability and thrown into doubt the idea that we can avoid dire consequences. We are undergoing a colossal vibe shift that extends beyond taste, aesthetics, politics, fashion, or policy. The world as we knew it is not coming back, and it’s entirely reasonable that we may find ourselves plagued with a general restlessness, a vague notion of disorder. It’s that funny feeling.<sup>2</sup>

We could add to that list things like a reawakening to racial injustice, the 2020 election cycle, the January 6 assault on the Capitol and the very institutions of democracy, waves of economic uncertainty, the politics of vaccines and masks, and increased incidence of gun violence, not to mention the massive changes in our personal relationships and interactions.

I know how it feels to me, and I know from conversations with people around me that we’re all feeling the collective weight of change and trauma. We know we ought to be doing something, but what we really want is to push the pause button on life. Or maybe we want life to keep going, but to check out of it for a while. It’s like when we know there’s something we’re supposed to do, but all we want to do is stay home and read a book or cover up with a blanket and binge-watch Netflix. I was trying to put words to this feeling in a conversation recently; someone (Bruce Jones) described it appropriately as “a general malaise.”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.8ball.report/?r=zifuc>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/elaminabdelmehmoud/vibe-shift-war-in-ukraine>

On NPR's *It's Been a Minute*, Abdelmohammed said "We are in an age of anxiety and stagnation both at the same time. And the vibes are off, man. The vibes are just off."<sup>3</sup>

We come together on this Sunday after Easter, a day many churches pessimistically refer to as "low Sunday" because of the predictable letdown after the crowds and the fanfares and the festive atmosphere of Resurrection Sunday. We had a wonderful celebration of Holy Week and Easter here at Church of the Saviour, with the largest in-person attendance we've seen in three years and an atmosphere filled with excitement and joy. But I don't think I'm the only one who experienced the holiday differently this year. Part of it may have been that my family couldn't be together because of the boys still being in quarantine from having COVID. Part of it could be the changes in our staff and my emotions related to that. But there's something about celebrating right now that makes me feel reluctant, like I can't really enjoy the moment because something else bad is going to happen...soon.

Then I started preparing for today's message. I reread the text that Rev. Moseng and I had chosen for today. This is not the text assigned in the lectionary for the Sunday after Easter. But when we held our planning retreat, something led us to choose this text for this day. As I've been studying it and praying over it the last few weeks, it's becoming clearer to me why God led us to this passage from John's Gospel.

Each of the Gospel writers tells the story of the final moments with Jesus differently. In Mark, the women find the empty tomb but tell no one what they had seen. In Matthew, Jesus appeared to the women and then to the disciples, summoning them to the mountaintop where he gave them the Great Commission. In Luke, Jesus appeared to the women, then to the companions on the Road to Emmaus, then to the disciples. He instructed them to wait for the Holy Spirit, then he ascended into heaven. In John, Jesus appeared to Mary and then to the disciples twice, including the well-known exchange that led to the term "Doubting Thomas." And then it concludes with a call to believe and experience life in Jesus. The end. But then there's an extra chapter, like a postscript or an epilogue. Whether it was written down with the rest of the gospel or added later is unclear. But it presents an important scene, one that is not altogether unfamiliar to us.

It was a couple weeks after the Resurrection. The disciples knew that Jesus had risen because they had seen him for themselves. But the vibe had shifted. There was work to do, but they weren't feeling it.

Some of the disciples were together, but not all of them. Those that were together were feeling the general malaise. Peter announced, "I'm going fishing." He had been a fisherman before Jesus called him to be a disciple, so going fishing felt natural to him. He reverted to familiar patterns of behavior. It was the first century Galilean equivalent of binge-watching Netflix. The other guys thought that sounded okay to them, too, so they went along.

They fished all night, but didn't catch anything. They probably didn't even care. (I'm told fishing isn't necessarily about what you catch, but just being there.) They saw someone on the distant shore, but they couldn't make out who it was. He called to them, "Have you caught anything for breakfast? (*Uh, no.*) If you put your net on the other side of the boat, you will."

The net became so full of fish that they couldn't pull it into the boat. John elbowed Peter and whispered, "It's the Lord." Always the man of action, Peter jumped up, put his robe back on (apparently fishing naked was a thing), jumped into the water, and swam to shore. He must not have been much of a swimmer, or perhaps all those clothes slowed him down, because the boat made it back to shore at the same time, even though they were dragging a net with 153 fish in it.

They arrived to find that Jesus had built a fire and was already grilling some fish for them. He invited them to sit down and have breakfast with him. They knew it was him, but no one said anything. Maybe his resurrected appearance was different. Maybe their shock left them befuddled. Or maybe they knew they should be doing something more than hanging out and fishing, so they were ashamed to speak.

After they'd eaten, Jesus spoke to Peter, using his old name, the one he had before Jesus had given him the name of Peter. "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

That question must have stung. It was as if Peter's relationship with Jesus had been erased, that the time they spent together no longer counted. He was not Peter, the rock on which the church would be built. He was just Simon, John's kid. And it sure sounded as if Jesus wasn't even sure that Peter loved him anymore.

"Yes, Lord. You know I love you."

"Feed my lambs."

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1089922663>

Twice more the question was repeated, each time Peter confirming his love for Jesus, each time being directed to tend Jesus's sheep. Many commentators interpret the three times Jesus invited Peter to confess his love as a response to the three times Peter denied Jesus before the crucifixion. It's a powerful moment of grace and reconciliation – Jesus offering Peter a chance to be restored to the communion of the disciples. But it's also an unmistakable lesson about love in action. There's no missing the expectation of how one should demonstrate love for Jesus: *If you love me, take care of my sheep.*

This was the Jesus who said, "I am the Good Shepherd" and "I am the Gate of the Sheep." As Jesus had cared for and led the sheep, now it would be up to the disciples. If they loved him, they would take up the mantle and carry on his work, not settle for life as it was before. However this story made it into the version of the Gospel we have today, I'm glad it did. It's an amazingly well-told story that gives us insight into the lives of the disciples after the Resurrection. But I don't think this story is ultimately about them. *It's about us.*

Friends, we have endured much. We need to acknowledge the trauma of what we've experienced the last few years and practice appropriate self-care. It's okay to feel exhausted, spent, wrung out. If we act as though everything is fine, we're deceiving ourselves and are headed for trouble. We need to acknowledge our feelings to each other and to ourselves. We need to be intentional about how we invest our time and emotional energy. We need to strive for better balance between doing and being. The time we are living in – on the other side of the pandemic but not really free from the grip of COVID – is hard. But I pray that we won't get stuck longing for what used to be or become satisfied with surviving. Christ didn't come so we would simply survive. He came so we would thrive and help others to thrive, too.

It would be so easy for us to stick to safe, familiar patterns right now. But fishing on the same side of the boat only produces the same empty net. What might happen if we cast our net on the other side? Christ invites us and offers us the spiritual nourishment we need for the work that lies ahead. And he asks of us what he asked of Peter. *Do you love me? Feed my sheep.*

The vibe has shifted. As waves of uncertainty and loss sweep over us, it's easy to get dragged under. But we are not alone. We can find strength in community, in shared purpose, in being the beloved community formed by God's grace in Christ. Things are not what they were. But the Risen Christ is still among us. It's time to reclaim our love for Jesus and feed his sheep. Amen.