

3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY of EASTER

May 1, 2022

**COLLECT:** O GOD, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of the bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**THE LESSONS:** First Lesson: Acts 9:1-6, (7-20)

Psalm: 30

Second Lesson: Revelation 5:11-14

Gospel: John 21:1-19

**THE SERMON:** Today's lessons are about encounters with Christ after he has died and been resurrected.

I begin with the story of Paul, when he was still named Saul. Saul had an extraordinary life: He was born a Hebrew/Jew with Roman citizenship. This citizenship may have been awarded to his father or grandfather because of special service to the Roman government or it may have been purchased. He was also taught in rabbinic school by Gamaliel, one of the two greatest Hebrew rabbis. He was a Pharisee, one of the religious authorities and a member of the Sanhedrin Council/Court, the body that the Roman authorities allowed to make rules and laws for governing the behaviors of the Jews.

He also had a zeal for the observant worship of the faith. He was not pleased that the new rabbi, Jesus, had been attracting people and causing them to turn away the recognized Jewish worship. He had been healing people, forgiving sins, casting out demons and teaching that God did not

require the sacrifice of animals, in temple worship, for the forgiveness of sins. He had also raised Lazarus from the dead. He had also caused a commotion by disrupting commerce at the temple and accusing the religious authorities of turning the temple into a den of thieves instead of a house of worship and prayer.

You can say he was pleased that Jesus had been put to death. In his mind, this would have ended the influence Jesus had on the people. However, he heard that on the third day after being crucified on a cross and buried in a tomb, Jesus had been resurrected and seen alive to some of his followers. Some of his disciples continued to follow his teachings and were still gaining followers. The disciples and the followers were now called people of the Way.

Saul, angered by his zeal for the law, decided that he was going to put an end to people of the Way. He, on his own, went to the high priest and asked for a letter to the synagogues in Damascus showing that he had permission to disrupt and bring people of the Way to Jerusalem for prosecution.

However, as he was on the way to Damascus. Saul encountered Christ. He was flashed and blinded by a brilliant light. He was also knocked to the ground and he heard a voice asking him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" When Saul asked, "Who are you?" the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting." Jesus then directed Saul to go on into the city and he would receive further instructions there.

Of course, we know that this encounter thoroughly changed Saul's life. He went on into Damascus, and after three days, was able to see again after being prayed for and healed. Saul spent this time praying and as a result he

was converted and baptized. This persecutor of Jesus would now go on to become a great follower of Christ. I would call him a cheerleader.

In many ways, you can say Saul saw the light. Perhaps as a way to hide his having converted from the religious authorities, he would now be forever known as Paul, an apostle of Christ. He preached and spread the Gospel throughout the Middle East and even wrote 13 of the 27 books in the New Testament.

Have you ever had a Paul like experience? Have you ever had something so startling that it changed behaviors within your life?

I have, I count three events that happened to me in Vietnam where I would have been killed, except for the grace of God. I was so shaken that after each of the events, I prayed and promised God that if I got home safe, I would serve him the rest of my days.

The one that bothered me most? I was on special duty assignment as a medical laboratory advisor. I also had prior training as a surgical technician and had completed a naval medical corpsman course. This allowed me to function as the medic to the other advisors.

I was stationed in a town, out in the bush that you couldn't drive to because of the Vietcong. So, all travel and deliverance of supplies had to be done by air. I normally drove out to a landing strip to pick up the medical supplies I had ordered. I had to be there as the cargo plane came in. The landing and off-loading of the supplies had to be quick because the enemy would start lobbing rockets at the strip.

This day as I was on my way to the airstrip, I had a flat on my jeep and I had to stop and change it. I was late getting to the airstrip and when I got there the cargo plane had come and gone. The little wooden shack I normally parked next to had been blown to smithereens. Had I been on time, I would have been only body parts. It was the grace of God that I had the flat tire.

Because of this and the other two times, I have kept my promise to God and am standing here before you today. I hope that I am fighting a good fight and helping others to be strong in their faith.

In today's Gospel of John, some of Jesus disciples encounter the risen Christ after a night of fishing, A night in which they had caught nothing. Just at daybreak, a figure on the shore called out to them. "Have you caught any fish? They replied." No." The figure told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. Without hesitation they did and their nets became so full that they couldn't haul the fish into the boat. The disciple, John told Peter, "It is the Lord."

When they came to shore and had given Jesus some of the fish, he cooked them for breakfast. This was the third time the risen Jesus had appeared to his disciples. Once on the road to Emmaus and in the locked room where breathed on them giving them the Holy Spirit.

After breakfast, Jesus asked Peter, "Peter do you love me more than these?" Jesus was asking Peter if he loved Jesus more than the other disciples did. Peter answered, "yes Lord, you know that I love you. Jesus then said to him, "Feed my lambs." Jesus is saying take care of these disciples Peter. Jesus then asks him for a second time, "Simon son of John. Do you love me?" Calling Peter son of John puts more emphasis on the

question. Peter answered, "Lords, you know that I love you." Jesus then says, "Tend my sheep." Here I believe that Jesus is talking about all his followers not only the disciples."

The third time that Jesus asks, "Peter do you love me?" Peter is hurt and he answers with indignance, "Lord you know everything, you know that I love you!" This time Jesus tells, "Feed my sheep." Could Jesus be telling Peter to teach, instruct the disciples, set the example for them so that they can thrive and spread the Gospel?

Is the message here that if we love Jesus, it is more than just saying it? Is the lesson, the fact, that we must be committed and work? I think Jesus is telling us to show our love for him by spreading the word and doing good works.

If we have encountered Jesus, if we can say, "I've met the Lord." People should be able to see it in how you live your life. Are you a positive person wishing and wanting good for all people or you a person who believes in a corrupt golden rule? This being, **"I got mine and yours don't matter?"**

In your encounter or meeting with Christ will you like Paul see the light and love and serve the Lord?

What will you say, if asked by Jesus, "Do you love me?"

People of St. Matthew's it's not too late to have the right behavior or the right answer.

Rev. Lionel Starkes

