

Easter 3C  
 May 5, 2019  
 Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's  
 Acts 9:1-6                      Paul's conversion  
 Psalm 30  
 Revelation 5:11-14          Jesus ransomed saints to be a kingdom; Lion and Lamb  
 John 21:1-19                  Jesus appears to seven disciples as they were fishing

Our Scripture readings since Easter morning have been witnessed experiences of Jesus' resurrection; Easter morning: Mary Magdalene at the tomb; 1 Easter: the disciples behind locked doors in the upper room; and today: Saul, Ananias, and Peter.

When we read about those first witnesses of the resurrected Jesus, none of them recognized him at first. There was something different about him – no scripture account describes what that difference was. But Jesus was not just brought back to life. Jesus entered a new dimension of life. He would never die again. He was given a new body that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians as imperishable and immortal. Paul also tells us that we are joined in Jesus' resurrection. We are part of it, and WE are changed by it.

Today we see how the resurrection of Christ was experienced by three people; Peter, Saul, and Ananias. And we can see at least three aspects to their experience that we can learn from.

[Jesus finds a way to get their attention;] Peter had committed to follow Jesus no matter what, even if it cost him his own life. It turned out that he had problems fulfilling that vow, but the vow itself shows us how deeply Peter cared for Jesus. In our story today, Peter didn't recognize Jesus at first. But Jesus helped Peter and his friends catch fish in the Sea of Galilee, doing the same thing as when Peter had first met Jesus three years earlier. And Peter immediately swam to shore to see Jesus, not wanting to take the time for the boat to be rowed to shore.

For Ananias it only took a voice in a dream, and Ananias embraced that former persecutor and enemy Saul, and called him 'brother'.

For the Pharisee Saul, on his way to Damascus to 'arrest' followers of Christ and drag them back to Jerusalem, it took lightning bolts, blindness, and being healed by Ananias. It took all that for Jesus to get Saul's attention.

Jesus changes the volume of his voice, or the degree of his action, but Jesus finds a way to get our attention. Over the background noise of TV, radio, Smart Phones, work responsibilities, raising children, how loudly does Jesus need to speak to us sometimes to get our attention? (Conan 1 yr old, collapsed lung, failing – playing!)

[Jesus has a way of catching us at our worst; but responding with grace]; Peter had denied Jesus three times (definitely at his worst); Can you imagine how he felt as

he swam to shore to greet Jesus? How could he face the Lord he had denied, after vowing that he never would? What would Jesus do? What would Jesus say? But just as Peter was around a charcoal fire in the courtyard of the Sanhedrin when he denied Jesus, now he was around a charcoal fire, invited by Jesus to share in a breakfast of fish and bread. Jesus only showed love.

For Saul, he was busy hunting down Xns. He was caught up in pride over his ancestry, his education, and his zeal as a Pharisee. Jesus showed Saul, soon to be named Paul, how powerful God's grace is.

Jesus is with you and me, not just in our focused moments of prayer, but when we shake a finger at the driver who cut us off on those merging lanes on route 25; or when we say hurtful things to people we love. Jesus catches us, and makes us aware of what we're doing, and he shows us how powerful God's grace is. I have come to expect those moments. I keep an envelope in my car with 1's and 5's in it; when God speaks to my heart about someone, I can respond as God expects.

[Jesus changes relationships].

Jesus asked Peter three times – 'Do you love me?' Feed my lambs; tend my sheep; feed my sheep... Jesus required more than words from Peter. He needed Peter to realize that his life is changed because of Jesus. He can't go back to being a fisherman. Paul can't go back to making tents. I can't go back to the RV business.

When I decided to go to college to be an engineer, I saw a way to leave my little farm town. It led me to a career around cities – wearing 3-piece suits and wing-tipped shoes – and learning about corporate life as I worked for a Fortune 500 company. The decision of college changed my life.

My decision to live a life of faith in Jesus changed the friends I had, my use of spare time, the music I sing while I'm driving, and the way I handle good and bad events in my life. My decision of faith changed my relationship with God, and it changed me. What has the resurrected Jesus changed in your life?

Jesus finds the way to get our attention. He catches us at our worst, and shows us God's grace. He changes relationships. He was resurrected into a new being, we are joined with him, and we are changed too.

The exciting element to our being an Easter people is that we know that in our faith life we encounter Jesus himself. Not just a message that in history came from him, or just rules and ethics for life, not just a higher vision of our human destiny, or just a human face for God, but we experience Jesus himself, dwelling inside us.

May our resurrected Lord Jesus always speak to us, catch us, and change us, bringing us closer to the life God wants for us. Amen.