

Sermons at Saint Paul's

A Wellspring of spiritual; nourishment; A river of service in Jesus' Name

Easter III

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When I was in 4th grade, my teacher realized that I had a problem with my sight, and so she asked me to tell my father to have my eyes checked. When I got home, I told him what the teacher suggested but he dismissed the teacher's suggestion. Over time, he began to complain that when I am with him, I open wide my eyes, and that he doesn't appreciate that. I responded that I wasn't even aware that that was what I did. One day, he got frustrated enough to strike me, screaming that I was doing the very thing that he's asked me not to do. I pushed back with the response that I wasn't aware of opening eyes my wide, but even if it were true, my teacher suggested some time ago that I need to have my eyes checked but he dismissed the suggestion.

In response to his guilt, he had my eyes checked, and there I got my first prescription glasses, and did not run into any more problems with my dad about opening my eyes wide enough to see. Many are those who wear glasses-not that we are necessarily blind, but we wear those glasses so we can see, read and even mitigate the effect of the sun's rays on our eyes. For those of us who wear glasses, without them we become helpless, we turn to old familiar methods to deal with our frustration of not being able to read or see.

Jesus had earlier appeared to Peter and some of the disciples while Thomas was away. He then appeared again and proved himself being raised again to Thomas and the rest. As excited as the disciples were to have seen him, the question was, what next? What do we do with this information that he is risen from the dead? The frustration of not knowing what to do coupled with the disillusionment of a journey that had practically grinded to a halt, they returned back to the old and familiar Galilee and the life of being fishermen. Isn't the old and familiar all too comfortable as the last resort?

It is all too common for us to assume control of our present situation in order to pre-determine a particular future outcome. And so for Peter and his friends, going back to fish, was the natural response to their present predicament.

Meeting Jesus by the Sea of Tiberias, harkens back to the first time Jesus met Peter and his brother Andrew by the Sea of Galilee and promised to make them fishers of men. But here by the Sea of Tiberias, the fishermen again encounter Jesus, not as one they did not know, but one they knew, one they listened to, one they shared ministry with, one they ate with, one they watched crucified, one who died, is alive and present, one who seeks to continue the fellowship they enjoyed prior to his death, and one who confounds them.

For the sake of his personal belief and ego, and the fact that the people of the Way were corrupting the Jewish faith, Saul, took it upon himself to determine the future survival of the Jewish faith by persecuting those who were proclaiming another faith antithetical to his own.

Saul's delusion, which we also partake in, was that he thought he could determine the future if only he could control the present. But if we cannot even control the present, what is it that makes us believe that we can determine the future? And so blinded by a perverted zeal, Saul presided over the killing of Stephen and traveled both far and near to bring to Jerusalem those who belonged to the Way. Saul's theophany on the road to Damascus exposed him to his own lack of control, it exposed him to the reality of the risen and living Christ and his own need for help in dealing with his own blindness. For if he thought that the people of the Way were proclaiming a myth, now he's come face-to-face with the person who embodied the story. Saul was no longer dealing with an idle tale by a bunch of ignorant people, he was now dealing with a transforming reality. Saul came to realize that in fact the one whom he was persecuting was even aware of his persecution.

To understand Saul as one though unfit, and the last person to whom Christ revealed himself and called as an apostle, is to understand the intensity of this encounter with the risen and living Christ. More importantly, Saul came to realize that Jesus was actually present in the life of the community he was trying to kill off. If Jesus was present, then there was nothing he could do to stamp out the enthusiasm and fervor of the community of believers.

If Saul's judgment was clouded by his depth of understanding and knowledge of the Jewish scriptures, Peter and the disciples in today's gospel story, who although have seen the risen and living Christ on several occasions, still had no clue as to what they were to make of the entire story. So, on the one hand, we have someone with a depth of knowledge but is blinded by his knowledge, and on the other, a group of disciples with lesser grasp, and are blinded by their lack of understanding. However, what they both share in common is their commitment to the commandment to mission. Whether we lack understanding or not, whether we are full and brimming with knowledge or not, any encounter with the risen and living Christ is such that we can no longer remain blind. We cannot remain blind to caring for the sheep, blind to tending the sheep, blind to feeding the sheep.

When we are blind we become preoccupied with the what ifs of our world. What if we all worshipped the same God? What if we all ate the same food? What if we all looked the same? What if we all had the same skin color? What if we all loved people of the opposite sex? What if?

I think one of the important lessons of the resurrection of Jesus may be seen as providing the lens by which we can look at the world in a totally different way. The Lamb that was slain now receives power and glory because through his resurrection, we have come to acknowledge the God who did not abandon or surrender the earth but reconquered it, giving the world a new future and a new promise.

When Ananias visited Brother Saul, and laid hands on him, scales fell off his eyes, both literally and metaphorically. Saul began to see again, but this time he saw the world not from a blinded sight, but through the prism of the new future and the new promise of God's creation.

Those of us who in faith affirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ can no longer withdraw from the world, nor can we be slaves to the world—we must also see the world in a totally different way. In the midst of the old creation, we have come to know of God's new creation—a new creation that invites all to breakfast and dismisses none from his Supper. The interesting part is we do not need any glasses to see what God's new future and promise is about; because of the resurrection, we also can see and are active in making that new promise and future accessible to every creature in heaven and on earth. Amen.