

It's Easter tide, and will be for another 35 days. Until the Feast of Pentecost, our readings from the book of Acts and the gospel will be full of post-resurrection stories. We just heard the post-resurrection story of the extraordinary moment Saul met Jesus. On a dusty road in Syria, something happened which shaped the course of the Christian world.

Actually that encounter between Jesus and Saul, was more like a collision. Saul apparently required a *brighter* light, a *louder* voice and some theatrics to recognize God's presence in his life. But once God grabbed Saul's attention, he became Paul, and God used him for an incredible ministry. That's the post-Resurrection part of the story.

the story of Jesus and Saul is not just a post-resurrection story. It is also a Resurrection story – a story of an old life redeemed, and a new life begun. It's told three different times in the books of Acts, which suggests that this story of conversion had a powerful meaning and effect on the life of the early church.

Saul's striking experience (pun intended) of the risen Jesus reshaped his personal identity as Paul. At that moment he became the premier proclaimer of Christ, when he once had been the premier persecuter. It wasn't so much about changing who he was as it was about becoming all of whom God had meant him to be. It took an extraordinary event for Paul to re-interpret all that he was, all that he had and all that he did in the blinding light of Christ, literally. When Saul claimed God's call as his own, he came to recognize himself as Paul, by whose preaching "the light of the Gospel shines throughout the world."

The man Saul was not *replaced* by the Apostle Paul. Saul didn't die, and then Paul was born. Rather, God used the man Saul *already was* – with his huge personality, his natural intellect, his networking skills, his deep experience in the church and the world, his enthusiasm, and even the way he is so full of himself ---- God used all of who Saul was and redeemed him for work in a new direction. Paul himself says in his letter to the Galatians,<sup>1</sup> that God set him apart before he was born, and chose him to be an epiphany – a revelation of God's love to the world. After God's light knocked Saul to the ground, he became that light to the world.

The Holy Scriptures are full of resurrection stories. These are stories about new life, about God working in and through people in God's world. God's presence and God's purpose shine through the stories of creation, or rescue at the Red Sea, through the accounts of God's good care of every generation. God's voice is heard in the still small voice in the wilderness, in the specific call to each prophet, from the clouds at the Jordan River at Jesus baptism.

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 1: 15-16

Paul's example suggests that a redefinition of one person's life can bless the lives of countless others through faithful stewardship and committed discipleship. The promise of God's presence and purpose is revealed here through our faithful stewardship of all that we are and all that we do as the Church of the Resurrection.

God is continually calling us, the Church of the Resurrection to stop, evaluate and define who we are, what we have and what we do in the light of the gospel. God invites us to offer our intellect and skills, our unique and various personalities and experiences, our laughter and delight and direct them away from ourselves and into the neighborhood, the community, the world in order to reflect God's love. Once we have received the new life of Christ, that light, we cannot keep it to ourselves..

When Jesus meets up with the disciples on the shore in today's gospel lesson, they are discouraged, burned out from a non-productive night of fishing. Jesus introduces them to the resurrection life ---- and suggests that if what they were doing wasn't working for them, perhaps they should throw their nets on the other side of the boat. Try something new. And everything changed for them.

They shared breakfast, fish cooked by Jesus over the fire on the beach. And then Jesus speaks to Peter. "Do you love me?" Three times he asks. "Simon son of John, do you love me?" And three times Peter is given a chance to respond differently than he did before Jesus was crucified. Three times Peter responded "Yes, you know I love you Lord." Each time Jesus commanded him to make his love visible by feeding my lambs: tending my sheep, following me. Jesus is nudging Peter to take a stand on what he loves.

Jesus gives Peter another chance to acknowledge him, and Peter's past, like Paul's past is redeemed. Peter's impulsive nature becomes exactly what God needs in furthering his kingdom. And Simon son of John becomes Peter, the great leader of the church.

Jesus invitation to discipleship is more than a casual suggestion, It is a command. If we are to take part in a resurrection story, if we are to be the Church of the Resurrection, we must follow Jesus and do what he did: find ways to feed the hungry, respond to the broken hearted, heal those who are hurting, connect with people around us. And invite them to go deeper with us into life with God.

Paul's conversion, Peter's confession, our new lives in Christ --- are not about having arrived finally but about moving forward, and continually hearing and responding to Jesus asking us--- do you love me? Will you feed my sheep? Will you follow me? Will you define your beloved self by loving me by serving others?

Our new lives in Christ, are responses to that question: by throwing our nets on the other side of the boat, by seeking Christ in everyone we meet, by loving Christ by serving those whom Christ would serve, by following Christ where Christ leads, by defining ourselves by living Resurrection lives.