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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
May 1, 2022
Easter 3

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, there is something not quite right about our Gospel lesson this morning.

There is something amiss in that story about Jesus with his disciples, where they enjoy a breakfast by the sea.

There is something that doesn't strike us as making sense.

PAUSE

Now, this gospel reading takes place after Jesus has been raised from the dead.

It is another one of those resurrection appearances of Jesus from the Gospels.

And in this reading it says, that Jesus appeared to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias.

And the Sea of Tiberias is the same as the Sea of Galilee.

And we remember that the Sea of Galilee is located in northern Israel, and out of the Sea of Galilee flows the River Jordan, which empties into the Dead Sea in Judah, in the south.

And it is there around the Sea of Galilee where Jesus first called his disciples to follow him.

Jesus' ministry begins in northern Israel.

But by the time of Jesus' suffering and death, the disciples and Jesus have made their way down to Jerusalem in the south.

And now, and now, notice, in our Gospel reading for today, notice the disciples have apparently left Jerusalem and they have returned to the area around the Sea of Galilee in the north.

They have returned to the north and they are fishing in the Sea of Galilee.

So do you see what the problem is?

Do we see what is amiss here?

No?

The disciples were originally from the area around the Sea of Galilee.

And then they became disciples and followers of Jesus.

They had followed Jesus to Jerusalem, and observed his death and resurrection.

But now the disciples are back in the region around the Sea of Galilee, and they are fishing.

So, do we see the problem now?

No? I can see that you may still be missing it, so let me see if I can break it down for you.

The disciples were fishermen. They came from this area of northern Israel.

And then they had followed Jesus for three years, even witnessing his crucifixion and his rising, down here in Jerusalem.

But the disciples are back to their former lives as fishermen in Galilee.

They are back fishing.

So we see now what is wrong with this story, don't we?

We see then what is amiss, don't we?

Jesus' disciples have returned to their OLD lives.

Jesus' disciples have taken up their OLD work.

Jesus' disciples have done a 360, have made a full circle.

And so, Jesus must be thinking to himself, "Did what I do during my earthly ministry...did my miracles, my healings, my teachings, did my suffering, death, and rising, did all of that mean nothing?"

"Here are these disciples of mine back to their fishing as if nothing has happened."

PAUSE

And, you know, you know, I feel for Jesus here.

Indeed, I feel for Jesus throughout his earthly ministry.

For how many times do the disciples just not get it?

There was the time when Jesus performed the miracle of feeding five thousand people by multiplying loaves and fishes.

And then piggy-backing on that miraculous feeding, Jesus feeds four thousand people by again multiplying loaves and fishes.

And then we read not shortly thereafter that the disciples got in the boat but kicked themselves because they had forgotten to bring any bread with them, and the text says they only had one loaf of bread among them.

“Dope! Guys, Jesus just multiplied loaves of bread to feed thousands. Surely, Jesus can feed the twelve of you with one loaf.”

Yes, I feel for Jesus.

Furthermore, there are the three instances in which Jesus predicted his suffering and death in the hearing of the disciples.

Indeed, Jesus explained to his disciples over and over again about how he (Jesus) will sacrifice his life, that he will give his life for all people.

Jesus explains that his mission is about humility and dying on the cross.

And how do the disciples respond these predictions, these words about humble service and dying for others?

How do they respond?

Well, the disciples argue about who among them is the greatest, and they argue about who will get to sit at Jesus' left and Jesus' right when he comes into power.

They are all about power and prestige.

“Dope! Guys, Jesus' mission, and so your mission too is to be about service and sacrifice.”

And again, I feel for Jesus.

And then there was the time when the disciples were all sitting around the table with Jesus, celebrating with Jesus his Last Supper.

And Jesus tells the disciples that there is one among them who will betray him.

And what do the disciples do?

They all question themselves, "Surely not I will betray you. You don't mean me, do you?"

The disciples don't even trust their own loyalty toward Jesus.

Dope!

Yes, we have to feel for Jesus throughout his earthly ministry.

His disciples just don't get it.

And the point is brought home once more here in our Gospel reading for today.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, what do the disciples decide to do?

They decide that they will go back to their former lives as if nothing at all has happened.

And Jesus has to be wondering to himself, "Where did I get these guys?"

Indeed, in my opinion, the greatest sign that Jesus performs throughout his ministry...

In my opinion, Jesus' greatest miracle is the miracle of his patience with his disciples.

They just don't get it, and yet Jesus continues again and again to steer them on the right path.

PAUSE

Now, the apostle Paul, on the other hand, gets it.

In our reading from Acts this morning, we hear that Paul encounters Jesus on the road to Damascus.

And in that encounter, Paul is blinded. He is unable to see, until Paul goes to Ananias, who lays hands on him and baptizes him.

The result of which is that Paul has his sight restored.

And Paul then becomes the greatest champion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ within the early Church.

Indeed, there was declaration about Paul that preceded him in his missionary travels.

As Paul travelled around, people proclaimed, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy."

The early church saw Paul's transformation as truly the work of God, for how could Paul who was bent on destroying the Christian faith suddenly become its greatest champion.

Yes, Paul got it. And in truth, we should not to be too hard on the disciples in our Gospel reading today, for in truth, they will eventually get it as well.

And what it is "IT" that they get?

What is "IT" that Paul miraculously gets in our first reading.

And what is Jesus trying to make his disciples get in our Gospel reading?

Just this...that once one has an encounter with Jesus, one's life is never quite the same.

And this is what is so disheartening about the disciples in the Gospel reading; they want to go back to their former lives as if nothing has happened.

But, Jesus does help them then to see the truth.

PAUSE

So then, as we hear these stories today, as we read about the disciples by the Sea of Galilee, and as we hear about Paul, the question before us is, "Do we get IT?"

How are our lives transformed because we have had an encounter with Jesus?

More specifically, how has baptism, that encounter with Jesus, how has baptism impacted our lives?

How have we been changed like Paul, who was baptized?

How have we been changed like Peter, who jumped into the sea naked, which is actually meant to be a baptismal image in this Gospel reading?

How have we been changed? How has our life been altered by our encounter with Jesus in baptism?

PAUSE

Now, probably the single most important way in which our life is changed by baptism, indeed the most significant way in which our life is altered by an encounter with Jesus is that we are to see life around us differently.

This is why Paul is described as “blinded” until he receives the laying on of hands and is baptized.

This story may be something of a metaphor so as to say that we are all “blind” until we see with the eyes of faith.

All the more, in the event of baptism, when we encounter Jesus, the early Church understood that in that ritual of water and the word, our eyes are opened.

Baptism was even described in the early Church as Enlightenment or Illumination, both words drawing on the idea of baptism as instilling “light” on a person, whereby that person sees rightly with this light given in Christ.

Baptism, encountering Jesus, is meant then to transform us first and foremost by having us see the world correctly, by having us see the world through the eyes of faith.

And this is something we have been talking about in our Adult Sunday school class recently.

We have been talking about seeing the world through the lens of our faith.

We have been talking about seeing the events happening in the world theologically.

And for me, that means we do need to be somewhat fluent in the Bible so as to understand how God works in the world.

Indeed, it is uncanny how world events often resonate with the stories of the Bible.

And why is this important, Friends? Why is it important to see the world through the eyes of faith? Why is it important to be able to see world events theologically, to be able to apply scripture to events around us?

Because, to see the world theologically helps us see that the everything isn't happening on a whim, everything isn't happening without purpose.

No, when we see the world through the eyes of faith, we can see order, we see meaning.

And this I think helps alleviate our fear and anxiety, so as to know then that ultimately God is still in control.

But it all starts with recognizing that when we encounter Jesus, like Paul, like Peter, when we encounter Jesus, we are changed, our former life is transformed.

And that is a good thing, because then, and only then, can we can begin to see aright.

Only then can we experience Enlightenment, only then can we experience Illumination.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

