

Then, while Jesus is on trial, Peter denies knowing Jesus three times. When the women come to tell him that the tomb is empty, he doesn't believe them. To his credit, he goes to see for himself. Peter is in the room when Jesus appears following the resurrection, showing his hands and his side to the disciples first, and a week later to Thomas.

Today, after all that Peter has seen, heard, and experienced, John tells us he has decided to go fishing. Peter was a fisherman when Jesus called him to "follow me." Maybe, after all that has happened, Peter is seeking solace in the one thing he truly knows, and is usually good at. Especially since being good at discipleship has presented such a challenge for him.

When we have had an extraordinary experience, one that truly changes us, how do we respond? Do we acknowledge what has happened and then return to the way of life we know best? Or in that transformative moment do we choose to follow a different path? Possibly, like Peter, we revert to our old way, until soon it becomes clear that is not going to work.

Today, in John's gospel we have Jesus' third and final post-resurrection appearance to the disciples. It is affectionately known as "breakfast on the beach," an otherwise ordinary event except for its extraordinary circumstances.

There was no catch until Jesus showed up. It was he who instructed Peter to cast his nets on the other side of the boat. It was Jesus who cooked for these disciples, and it was in the meal that they became sure it was he. Peter, hearing from the beloved disciple it was the Lord, inexplicably put on clothes and then jumped in the water to get to shore. I can only imagine he felt it was a sign of respect to come to the Lord fully clothed, even if dripping wet.

As breakfast was ending, Jesus turned to Peter and asked him, "Do you love me?" He did this three times, and each time Peter responded, with increasing exasperation I think, "You know I do." But the three times is significant because it mirrors Peter's denial of knowing Jesus during Jesus' trial. It is almost like Jesus is allowing Peter to redeem himself, because once his conscience is clear he will be able to go about the work Jesus has set before him, to tend Jesus' sheep.

While the gospel is always good news about Jesus, it is amazing to me how much this final chapter of the gospel of John is about Peter. It doesn't work for Peter to go back to the way things were before his life with Jesus as his disciple, because this encounter has changed him in extraordinary ways. As unsuccessful as he was that day before Jesus appeared, he will be profoundly successful in tending Jesus' sheep as the Book of Acts, the account of the first decades of the Christian movement, "The Way," tells us.

In the final few verses, Jesus appears to describe to Peter the martyr's death that stands before him. Peter must be changed, because he doesn't deny Jesus' prediction as impossible. Instead, Jesus says to him, "Follow me." And we know, as we will hear in the coming weeks through the

Book of the Acts of the Apostles, following the ascension of Jesus into heaven, and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, that he truly does.

Peter is good news for us. Because as Peter does, in his own bumbling way, so can we. Any encounter we have with Jesus has the power to change us so that we can act in extraordinary ways. Jesus has redeemed us, we are reconciled to God, and so we can go about the work God has given us to do, with integrity and joy.

One last thing for this morning. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles, ostensibly written by Luke is a chronicle of the explosive growth of the early Christian movement. It is about both Peter and Paul, and the ways their ministries spread the gospel throughout the middle east in the first century.

We meet Paul today in our reading from Acts. He is still known as Saul, a fervent and faithful Jew, who understands his way of life threatened by those who would name Jesus the Messiah and worship him as the son of God. We would do well to remember that God can be known in a variety of ways, God the Father, Yahweh, Jehovah, Allah, Creator, Great Spirit or Great Mystery, but is still and always God. To say that God can be known in only one way is blasphemous, because it defines the power of God in human terms. We do that at our peril.

Yet, that is just what Saul was doing as he persecuted the men and women who followed “The Way,” the early name for the Christian movement. That is, until he was knocked off his horse on the road to Damascus and heard the voice of Jesus asking him, “Why do you persecute me?” If we were to read on, we would discover this was an extraordinary and transformative act which changed the trajectory of Saul’s, now Paul’s, life forever.

What we celebrate in Eastertide is our redemption and reconciliation to God; God’s profound love for Jesus whom God vindicated when the unjust world condemned him for simply calling on all to live justly, with mercy, in peace, and love, as God created us to live. All of this has the power, and the promise, to transform our lives, so that we can live lives in the image of God in whom we are all, everyone of us, no matter our race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic status, or any other way the world would “other” us, created. As Christians, once we know Jesus as our Lord and Savior and God through him, we can’t go back to the way we were; we are changed so we change the world. Just like Peter. Just like Paul.