

3 Easter, Year C
April 18, 2010
Saint Ann's, Old Lyme

Open, O Lord, the eyes of our faith, that we may behold you in your redeeming work.
Amen.

Just about everyone in today's readings, it would seem, had returned to 'pre-Resurrection' status. Peter was back fishing, up north in the Sea of Galilee, and Paul was on his way to Damascus, being zealous for the faith of his ancestors.

It might have seemed that things were just the way they had been before Good Friday. Except, --- the Resurrection clearly had happened, because the Resurrected Lord kept showing up in one place after another.

In today's Gospel lesson, the risen Jesus showed up on the beach for a little breakfast barbecue. Of course Peter and the others didn't know that it was Jesus, at least not at first. For all they knew, this was just some friendly stranger handing out free advice about how to fish.

But when Peter and his pals did what the stranger suggested and threw their nets 'just so', it was then that their eyes were opened, and they discovered the Resurrected Lord right there, right in their very midst. And suddenly, they were no longer back in their 'pre-Resurrection' state. To be sure, they were the same people, and they were in the same place, and they were doing a lot of the same stuff, but their eyes were open – open to the presence of the Lord in their very midst.

We also heard today about Paul – energetic, strong-willed, opinionated Paul – who was doing everything in his power to stamp out Christianity. This wasn't the kind of 'annoyance' stuff that we have to put up with today, like people wondering if we're crazy because we have a faith and actually attend church. This was persecution. Paul was trying to eliminate the Christian faith from the face of the earth, and he didn't much care how he accomplished that goal.

Peter and Paul were two very different people. They came from different places and had vastly different personalities, and Paul's conversion was certainly more dramatic than Peter's, as we've just heard in the familiar 'Damascus Road' story. But both of them had their eyes opened to see the Risen Lord in their lives and in their world. And in their stories are some striking similarities.

To start with, God acted first. Jesus was present and calling the shots, and that's the reason why Paul was suddenly receptive to the presence of Jesus in his life, and why Peter's fishing trip suddenly turned productive. The mission is always God's, and the catch is always the Lord's, though now and again, we do get to haul in the nets.

But also, in both of these stories, there was positive human response to the divine initiative. Peter did cast the nets as Jesus suggested. And with Paul, the positive human response came from an otherwise obscure fellow named Ananias. And even though Ananias originally objected to the very notion that he was supposed to give aid and comfort to Paul, God said, ‘trust me’, and that’s what Ananias did.

And the eyes of faith were opened.

And suddenly, they were no longer back in their ‘pre-Resurrection’ state. They were the same people, to be sure, but their eyes were open to behold the presence of the Lord in their midst. And terrific things began to happen.

And it’s not just their story. It’s our story too.

Like Peter and Paul, we too keep slipping into our ‘pre-Resurrection’ selves, and God keeps showing up in our world, too. God keeps acting, and when we trust God and cooperate with God, our eyes of faith are opened, and terrific things begin to happen.

But it’s not always easy, is it? For one thing, what we would like is for God to say: ‘Tell you what: I’ll show you what I’m prepared to do, and then you can decide if you want to trust me and jump on the bandwagon’. Instead, it works more like this: God says, ‘first, trust me. Trust me, and then hang on for the ride; trust me, and get ready for a fabulous adventure’. For example: God says, ‘trust me, Nancy Miller. I know you would never have dreamed this up by yourself, but tell the bishop you feel called to ordained ministry – give it a go, and then I’ll show you what it really means to love what you do for a living’.

Trust me, God says, and I will open your eyes of faith; I will show you joy and peace. It’s not always easy. Ananias certainly knew how hard it could be to trust God. He must have thought Jesus had taken leave of his senses. ‘What do you mean, ‘be nice to Paul’; he’s trying to kill us.

And when Jesus told the disciples to cast their nets on the other side of the boat, they made quite a catch, but even as they hauled in the nets, there was a lot of resistance. It’s not always easy, because disciples aren’t always cherished by the world. Their eyes of faith don’t guarantee power, money, or any other worldly measure of ‘success’.

The world often thinks we look un-cool, politically incorrect, and maybe not too smart, either. Let’s face it, when we hear in the Gospel that Peter put on some clothes and then jumped into the lake, he doesn’t exactly look like a rocket scientist, does he?

It’s not always easy, being a disciple of Jesus Christ. And because disciples aren’t always valued by the world out there, Christian mission always presumes a community of faith and love and support from which it is launched and nourished – and not only for Peter and Paul, but for us, too.

And it's not only their story; it's our story too. So, in the midst of our 21st century cares and occupations – and even when we slip into our own pre-Resurrection states – the Risen Lord keeps showing up. The Risen Lord appears in libraries and restaurants and baseball fields, and in smiling faces and tear-filled eyes. The Risen Lord is present in our sleeping and in our waking, in our joys and in our sorrows.

The Resurrection has happened, and the Resurrected Lord keeps appearing. And God has promised that the pattern will continue. And we are challenged to trust God and to discover our eyes of faith, and sometimes, like Ananias, we get to haul in the nets by helping others claim their eyes of faith.

And then, we're told to expect wonderful things – miracles, even – like being nourished not only with food and fellowship, but also with the bread of life and the cup of salvation.

It's Peter's story, and it's Paul's story, and, it's our story too. And so we join with them as we pray: be present, Risen Lord, in our lives and in our world, and open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold you in all your redeeming work. Amen.

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