

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Second Sunday of Easter

May 1, 2022

Psalm 30:1–12 (ESV):

Praise the Name of the Lord

1 I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up

and have not let my foes rejoice over me.

2 O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,

and you have healed me.

3 O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol;

you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.

4 Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints,

and give thanks to his holy name.

5 For his anger is but for a moment,

and his favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night,

but joy comes with the morning.

6 As for me, I said in my prosperity,

“I shall never be moved.”

7 By your favor, O LORD,

you made my mountain stand strong;

you hid your face;

I was dismayed.

8 To you, O LORD, I cry,

and to the Lord I plead for mercy:

9 “What profit is there in my death,

if I go down to the pit?

Will the dust praise you?

Will it tell of your faithfulness?

10 Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me!

O LORD, be my helper!"

11 You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;

you have loosed my sackcloth

and clothed me with gladness,

12 that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent.

O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!

1st Scripture Reading: Acts 9:1–22 (ESV):

The Conversion of Saul

9 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. 4 And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" 5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show

him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; 19 and taking food, he was strengthened.

Saul Proclaims Jesus in Synagogues

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. 20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

EPISTLE: Revelation 5:1-14 (ESV):

The Scroll and the Lamb

5 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” 3 And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, 4 and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5 And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

8. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,

for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”

11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders
the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,
12 saying with a loud voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!”

13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea,
and all that is in them, saying,

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Gospel: John 21:1–19 (ESV):

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

21 After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. **2** Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. **3** Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. **5** Jesus said to them, “**Children, do you have any fish?**” They answered him, “No.” **6** He said to them, “**Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.**” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. **7** That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, “**It is the Lord!**” **When** Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. **8** The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

9 When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, **“Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.”** 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, **“Come and have breakfast.”** Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. 14 This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Jesus and Peter

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, **“Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”** He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, **“Feed my lambs.”** 16 He said to him a second time, **“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”** He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, **“Tend my sheep.”** 17 He said to him the third time, **“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”** Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, **“Feed my sheep.** 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, **“Follow me.”**

Sermon 18 – Third Sunday of Easter

“The Restoration of Simon Peter”

John 21:1-19

Dear friends,

Have you ever heard the phrase, “the rule of threes?” This refers to the art of oral storytelling, and how having three episodes, three characters, three plot points, or whatever it may be, that it gives the best amount of variety without overwhelming. The

rule of threes gave us the trilogy as a storytelling format, the trio as a group of characters, all sorts of things. God doesn't follow human rules but God does sometimes do things in groups of numbers, as He does in our Gospel lesson today. This Gospel has three all over it. We know God is three in one, three is the number of completeness in the Bible, full circle. God appears three times to His disciples in John, and He has three sets of words for St. Peter in the later part of our Gospel. Why is this? What does it mean? It's never worth stressing too much about numbers in the Bible, they aren't really what's important, but it should make your ears perk up a little and pay better attention when you see so many things coming together as they do in our Gospel lesson today. What's happening here is super important, so, what's happening?

You know Christ has been crucified and has risen, but I want to kinda skip over the first part of this with just a few brief comments. The miraculous catch of fish is such a wonderful story, because Jesus appears to His disciples not with some great deep mystical message, not with some grand mission, but He appears to His disciples and just helps them catch some fish, then eats with them. It is such an incredibly understated way of reuniting them with Himself, a reminder that these men were not just Jesus' minions, they were His friends. They get together over a catch of fish and have some food with God. A very plain, intimate show of God's love, and all the more striking for it.

What happens next is what I want to discuss. There is still one loose end, and that is Simon Peter. Simon Peter is the most prominently featured disciple by a country mile, this guy seems to stand for the disciples in a way. Jesus recognizes Peter early on as a leader, a force to be reckoned with among the group. Most of the disciples we know nothing about because we never see them, but we see Peter all the time. He has something to say no matter what happens. It is Peter who Jesus speaks to most often in the Gospels, again, this guy is a leader, and God uses group dynamics of human beings just like He uses everything else. Leaders are very important, and God not only recognizes that, but He uses it to bless His people. Peter is a leader, Peter knows this, you can tell that Peter takes that job seriously with how he behaves.

As a leader, it was Peter's responsibility to rally the disciples around Jesus when He needed them most. As a leader, Peter could have had the disciples follow Jesus in His arrest and crucifixion. He didn't. You can reliably bet that Peter knows this. Peter knows that the Lord trusted him in a way that He didn't trust the others. Peter remembers his boasts that he'll follow Jesus anywhere, even into the grave. Peter remembers that he panicked and lost his nerve when a slave girl casually asked Peter if he was a Galilean. The higher one goes up the ladder, the farther the fall, and Peter has fallen far. He knows he's fallen far. He had one job. Stand with Jesus. Be a disciple. Show the others how it is done. He failed that job. The Bible doesn't say this, but you can guess that Peter thinks he's finished. Big bad Simon Peter didn't deliver. He choked when the critical moment came.

Let's look at how Jesus handles this. **“15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”** It is a quiet moment. Jesus, by rights, should've been raging, or at least disappointed. Peter let Him down spectacularly, despite being warned ahead of time that this was what he would do. Peter is expecting retribution, consequence, and he is right to do so. What does Jesus call on us to do, as His disciples? To believe in Him and to confess Him. The Bible says in several different places we must confess God before men, we must be honest about who we are as Christians and what we believe as Christians, regardless of the consequences. Peter did not do this. He had the opportunity handed to him on a golden plate and he did not do this, he called down curses on himself and swore that he didn't even know who Jesus was. Peter deserves to be sacked at the very least, kicked down, he deserves hellfire, frankly, by the standards the Bible itself sets.

I've talked about how Peter is special, but what, in the end, did he do? He sinned. He sinned in a way that we all do from time to time, focusing on the dangers of the moment rather than the promises of God. If you're anything like me, you have followed Peter's sin here. In my youth I had chances, I can think of at least a few of them, where I could've spoken clearly about how I was a Christian and chose not to. I chose to lie, because I was afraid, or because there was a pretty girl that I wanted to impress, or any

one of a thousand other reasons. Maybe you've done the same. We fail God in every way as sinners, we fail to confess Him, fail to do what He wants, fail to be the people that God wants us to be. Jesus knows this when He's dealing with Peter. He knows these words that He says will live forever, speaking to us, and so He speaks them to Peter. He speaks words of forgiveness.

But the way He does it is so different to what we might expect. Jesus doesn't say a word about Peter's betrayal. He doesn't say the word sin, or the word forgiveness. It's all in the subtext, here, this is between them. Peter's betrayal is the elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about, so Jesus doesn't talk about it, and you can bet that Peter knows exactly what He's doing.

“He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” Do you see what He's doing? He's not confronting Peter in a hostile way, He's not telling Peter how disappointed He is. He's restoring Peter. He's giving Peter a chance to do it again, to do it right. Three times Peter disowned Him, now, three times, Peter owns Jesus. He confesses Jesus. And Jesus is there letting Him do it, encouraging Him to do it. Accepting what He does. Jesus isn't interrogating Peter because He doesn't believe Him, Jesus is putting Peter back in the saddle again, back in action, back to Peter's place as the head of the pack.

“17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” That's where the repentance is. You know everything. You know what I did. But you know I love you. And Jesus takes that at face value. He doesn't demand penance, or restitution, or revenge, He just takes Peter's repentance and gives Peter back His life and His place. Simon Peter is the rock on which the Christian church will be built, Jesus wasn't lying when He said that. All those things that made Peter a great leader make Him a great apostle, an outstanding witness. He just needed to have His sins purified, taken from Him. God sees Peter in a way none of us do, this guy can do great things, He just needs a new heart, a new soul, a new

self. He just needs forgiveness, restoration, another chance. **“Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”** Our legends tell us that Peter would be martyred for His faith, crucified upside down. Jesus doesn't do this kind of thing for any of the other disciples. Only Peter gets this one-on-one assurance that one day, he will die for Jesus, just like he should've at Gethsemane.

This is what Christ does. He does not forgive because He must, He forgives because He sees the things inside of you that you cannot see. Christ sees the potential in you, He sees the use of you, and He forgives and brings that potential and use out of you. He cleanses you with His blood and puts you to good work. We will likely not do the work that Simon Peter did, building the church from scratch and getting crucified for Jesus. What of it? Christ wants all His people to play their part in His grand plan, and He will peer into your heart and see talents you didn't even know you had. They're in there. And He will bring you into His kingdom, Sunday after Sunday, to put you to use in that kingdom. You may not think you can do much of worth. Look at Peter and remember. It isn't about how badly you screw up, how far you fall, or what you can do. It is about how Jesus can restore you, make you whole again, and use you for whatever purpose He's set aside for you. He found a use for Simon Peter, braggy, broken Simon Peter, even after He shamed Himself by being a coward. He will find a use for you too.

Amen.