

## **Acts 9**

Meanwhile, Saul was still spewing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest, 2 seeking letters to the synagogues in Damascus. If he found persons who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, these letters would authorize him to take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 During the journey, as he approached Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven encircled him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice asking him, "Saul, Saul, why are you harassing me?"

5 Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?"

"I am Jesus, whom you are harassing," came the reply. 6 "Now get up and enter the city. You will be told what you must do."

## **Revelation 5**

11 Then I looked, and I heard the sound of many angels surrounding the throne, the living creatures, and the elders. They numbered in the millions—thousands upon thousands. 12 They said in a loud voice,

"Worthy is the slaughtered Lamb  
to receive power, wealth, wisdom, and might,  
and honor, glory, and blessing."

13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea—I heard everything everywhere say,

"Blessing, honor, glory, and power belong  
to the one seated on the throne  
and to the Lamb  
forever and always."

14 Then the four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshipped.

## **John 21**

<sup>15</sup> When they finished eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." <sup>16</sup> Jesus asked a second time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." <sup>17</sup> He asked a third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was sad that Jesus asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" He replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> I assure you that when you were younger you tied your own belt and walked around wherever you wanted. When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and another will tie your belt and lead you where you don't want to go." <sup>19</sup> He said this to show the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. After saying this, Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me."

## **Sermon**

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Today, we're embarking upon a new sermon series called, "Visions of Resurrection." For the rest of the Easter season, we'll see different vignettes every Sunday that tell us about Jesus' resurrected life, about what new life looks like. We'll see not just what's possible after death, but what God calls us to beyond death.

And on most Sundays in this season, we get many different resurrection pictures through our reading of Scripture. In Acts, we see Jesus' resurrection power as he confronts Saul, who is persecuting the church, and turns Saul toward new life. And then we see in Revelation an anticipation of our final resurrection, where the glory of God enraptures, heals, and completes us all.

Our focus today is on John's story of the resurrected Jesus meeting Peter. In that Gospel lesson we see is this:  
**resurrection offers an opportunity to mend our broken lives.**

This might be hard to see at first, because Jesus seems a bit harsh on Peter. Three times Jesus questions whether Peter truly loves him, questions his faithfulness, his loyalty, his care. On the surface, that hardly seems the act of a friend.

Let's be honest. This line of questioning can make us uncomfortable because no one likes for their integrity to be questioned. No relationship partner likes to hear from their beloved, "do you really love me?" No child, sweating through their chores, wants to hear, "did you try your hardest?" No student, after hours over homework, wishes for a teacher to say, "Did you actually understand this?" When someone questions us in these ways, we often feel ourselves enter a sort of Fight or Flight mode. We either want to run from the question, ignoring the pain that it's brought us, or to answer it, defending ourselves.

Maybe, though, the reason that we don't like these questions all the time is because they're questions that need

to be asked of us. I don't know about each of you, but as a child, I was known to maybe be a bit lax in my cores. I was less concerned with doing a good job and instead was just doing enough to get by so I could get back to the golf course or playing video games. So, no, I probably didn't try my hardest. And as a student, my attention to homework often depended upon where my friends were going that night or if I got a chance to play drums for a new gig. So, no, though I fancied myself smart enough to get by, I didn't always understand.

The love question, though, that's the hardest one. Every time I've been asked this question – from awkward middle school relationships and high school sweethearts to relationships of family and friends where life should be so simple and yet always became so complex – I believed the answer was yes, but I also knew, at some level, just how bad I was at loving other people. Even as I loved them, I failed at

loving them. At some level, we're all in this boat. We love and at the same time we know how poorly we love.

Peter, too, is quite bad at loving. This is the disciple who first recognized Jesus as the messiah, God's chosen one, and then tried to order him around. This is the disciple who promised to follow Jesus to the very end, and then denied even knowing him three times on the way to the cross. Do you love me? Are you sure? No really, are you sure? Because your past behavior doesn't say, "I love you." In fact, it screamed, "I don't even know him."

But here, in the resurrection, Jesus refuses to let those failures define Peter's identity. Instead, Jesus gives Peter a chance, an opportunity, to mend these broken pieces of his life. Three times Peter denied Jesus before the crucifixion, and three times now Jesus allows Peter to replace those denials with commitments of love. Resurrection begins with God mending together Jesus' body. Once broken by the

cross, the body of Jesus is reknit by the love of God. The breath of life, once departed from this body, now returns through the breath of the Holy Spirit. And then Peter's brokenness comes into focus for him, for Jesus, and for us as well. Just as Jesus' body goes from brokenness to healing, so too in the resurrection we find restoration out of our failures.

That's just it. Resurrection presumes brokenness. New life presumes death. *In Peter's case, he's got to face that brokenness to find resurrection.* Jesus' questions aren't meant to shame Peter, but to show him the places where healing is possible. The question of love allows Peter to move from a denial to an embrace of Jesus, from doubt and fear at the death of his friend to belief and courage in the resurrection of God.

And it's clear that Peter has a role in this resurrection life. Jesus asks Peter a question, but he doesn't tell Peter the answer. Jesus invites Peter to become a part of the

resurrection, to take up that new life, to buy in and triple down. Jesus' work forgives Peter of his past and shows him what future is possible. Yet, Jesus doesn't live Peter's life for him. Jesus invites Peter to become the person God created him to be.

And how powerful is that? Jesus doesn't just forgive us, though that's surely a part of the resurrection process. Forgiveness sets us free, but it doesn't make us grow. Resurrection, new life, looks at those areas where we've failed, where we've faltered, and gives us chances to learn, to grow, to develop our life of faith. Resurrection doesn't mean that our brokenness is forgotten. It means that our wounds become scars. Our torn muscles knit together, our shattered bones mend again, stronger than they ever were before.

What Peter sees is that the once-dead Body of Christ is now alive, is now powerful, and is about bringing

resurrection to everyone along the paths of life. Jesus faces the pain that still plagues us because Jesus faced death and even that couldn't keep him from returning to abundant life. That's good news! Those things from our past that may conjure up shame on our own can be overcome with the second chance at life we receive in the resurrection.

We have the same opportunity and same hope as Peter. Resurrection is an opportunity for us to see where the brokenness remains in our lives and then to work toward health, toward healing, toward wholeness, to turn our denials into expressions of love. Just like Peter, though, if we meet the resurrected Jesus, he will lay that open for us. To paraphrase the Chronicles of Narnia, Jesus is a good God, but he isn't tame, and that doesn't always feel nice. Resurrection means dealing with the death in our lives,

facing the things that try to hold us in the tomb, and rolling the stones away to find the Body of Christ risen to new life.

And remember, dear friends, you're the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now lives inside of us. The spirit of Jesus' new life is the spirit of our new life. We are the body of Christ. We are meant to learn from our mistakes, to grow out of our faults, to heal from our ills, to rise from the dead. And we're meant to bring that opportunity for abundant life to others as well.

That's thing to remember as we read this story. We're not just meant to be Peter. We're also meant to be Jesus. Jesus confronts us in the resurrection to that we might become the resurrected Body of Christ. Christ's healing was for our healing, and our healing is for the world's healing. We're meant to grow ourselves and help others grow. Resurrection is not for isolation. Resurrection, true resurrection, is always for community.

This looks like lots of things. This looks like CLC sharing your pastor with the denomination's Appalachian Ministry Task Force so we can listen to our sisters and brothers across the region and develop new strategies for resurrection ministry together. This looks like our youth using Friday and Saturday's lock-in not just as a time for fun and education but serving others through packing emergency assistance kits for Lutheran World Relief and the Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley. This looks like listening to our friends who suffer from depression, sitting with our friends who live with eating disorders, embracing our friends who battle addiction. We, the Body of Christ, are not meant to ignore the pains that plague our people, but instead to help them find ways to make progress, to not be defined by their struggles but instead foster hope for a future of life abundant, to give everyone a chance to turn their denials into expressions of love.

In short, God makes us the Body of Christ so that we can help be the change we need to see in this world. When Jesus confronts Peter with these questions, so too Jesus is confronting us. Do you love me? Then live lives focused on healing rather than brokenness. But do you love me? Create opportunities for others to find healing as well. No, really, do you love me? Yes Lord, you know we love you. It's time for us to live that love together, working toward healing and wholeness alongside one another. Amen.