Sermon for Third Sunday of Easter, May 4, 2025

St. Luke's Episcopal Church

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

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Acts 9:1-6, (7-20) Psalm 30 Revelation 5:11-14 John 21:1-19

We will exalt you, O LORD, because you have lifted us up and have not let the enemies triumph over us. Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning. Amen.
(from Psalm 30)

Good morning, friends. Welcome together on this beautiful day. When the sun is bright and the day is warm and all is green with new growth, we can easily raise our voices and hearts in praise of God.

We are here, together. And we continue to gather together in faith and love, even when we face deep challenges. We come together through thick and thin. We come together in God's presence, through bright times and times of shadow, through the good and the bad, in times of delight and times of sorrow.

So it's been for ages, with the Church. From the beginning, the followers of Jesus gathered together in courage, support, and joy that was defiant in the face of ugliness in the world around them, and in the face of forces that rose up as enemies against them. While religious leaders of their own culture derided and insulted them, and began to hunt them down to put them in prison or seize their property or injure or kill them, they continued in passionate commitment to following the Way of Christ. While rulers of the age turned hot against them, they continued to gather, support each other, and through the witness of the self-giving lovingkindness of the spirit of Christ had an impact on the world around them.

We pray today for God's continuing direction and strength as we navigate the troubled waters of the times in which we live. We are here to cry out together in the words of the ancient Psalm that enemies have not triumphed over us – and, while weeping may spend the night, joy comes in the morning.

So, let's turn to today's scriptures. Today's Gospel reading from John, and today's reading from the book of Acts, give us some very direct examples of the ways the risen Christ Jesus speaks to us. I want to walk with you this morning through some chapters of life in which Christ meets us and speaks to us or through us. We hear the risen Jesus speak clearly in some strong, direct, and caring but pointed ways through these two portions of scripture – and these statements speak to us at different points in our lives.

"You have no fish, have you?"
"Come and have breakfast."
"Feed my sheep."
"Get up."

"Cast the net to the right side of the boat."
"Do you love me?"
"Why do you persecute me?"
"Go."

"When you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go."

"Follow me."

Each of these statements and questions of Jesus is direct. The risen Jesus does not mince words. He speaks simply and directly, in words that invite, confront, clarify, and invite again. He calls the men in the boat to face the reality of their frustration that they have spent all this time all night fishing and have nothing to show for it. He invites them to try once again and to do something a different way than they have done before. He invites them to a a meal together with him. During this meal, he confronts one of them with a very direct question – he asks about this one's depth of connection to him. And then, when this one responds, he directs this one to act – and he lays out the reality ahead for this one, that the path ahead will not be easy. And then, he invites him to rise, get up, and follow. Later, the ascended Jesus confronts the angry zealot on the road with a very direct question – he asks the zealot about the reason for the harmful actions he is taking. He then invites him to get up and to be led, blind, to a place where healing can happen. And he invites another follower to go and meet this zealot that had designs against him and his companions.

Get up. Go. Feed my sheep. Follow me.

But first, come. *Come and have breakfast.* The invitation to act arises out of time together in trusting, loving, caring, and honest relationship.

So, let's walk through some of these statements of Jesus specifically. They ring out across different times, circumstances, places, and phases of our lives.

Come and have breakfast.

Shared meals matter. Our fellowship at any table is a gift. This is why our feast at God's table each week continues after the service with food and fellowship in our coffee hour – and it's why our time together in coffee hour and other gatherings is so important. We meet Christ in the hospitality of others and in the hospitality we offer others.

I remember those wonderful mornings with my family during vacations in Maine, in the cabin of that a Methodist pastor built for his family and then shared with others – we would get up really early, before dawn, to go fishing, and then we'd clean the fish and pan-fry them to eat for breakfast with some potato hash – we would go picking wild blueberries on Blueberry Hill and then put them in batter for blueberry pancakes.

We meet Jesus in the warm, open-hearted, open-handed, everyday hospitality we offer each other.

I remember from some years ago when I gathered people from across the Episcopal church to learn together the work of courageous and caring conversation, of an intentional approach to evangelism that is rooted in listening for, naming, and honoring the Holy in the life of each person. At this "evangelism boot camp," we practiced such conversation with each other and then went out to neighborhoods where folks could meet new people. Our folks came back deeply enriched from the conversations they had. One young seminary student walked a neighborhood around a struggling Episcopal church behind a shopping mall. The neighborhood had experienced a lot of change over a few decades, and there were many families from different parts of the world living there. The young man greeted folks along his walk, and started a conversation with tow women out on their porch. They invited him up for conversation. They offered him breakfast, and the older woman (the mother) brought out a breakfast of eggs and flatbread to share together. The women were both Muslim. They were both practicing the hospitality that was a deep cultural value from their Middle East roots that they continued to live out here in America. The

conversation was rich, as they shared a meal – they all blessed each other in the giving and receiving of food, and in the free and open conversation they had about God, faith, life, and the world.

Come and have breakfast. Let's draw from this abundant, overflowing haul of fish in your nets.

And then, it goes further than that.

These times can open doorways for healing of relationships and hearts that have been broken, recovery of trust that has been lost, opening of new paths where there has been a sense of being lost or stuck.

It is in the space of courageous, caring conversation where we can open holy space with each other – for truths to be told, for caring but hard questions to be asked, for wrongs to be acknowledged and forgiven, for old hurts to be left behind and new spaces to be opened up.

Do you love me?

So, let's turn now to Peter, and to Paul.

Paul and Peter, often recognized as two great pillars of the Church, were very human and had a bit of a rough start. Jesus meets each in their weakest and darkest times.

Even after seeing Jesus risen from the dead, Peter could not shake his shame at having denied knowing Jesus three times. Jesus took him aside and asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." Jesus asked this three times. Jesus made a path for Peter to affirm his love for Jesus three times, so he could give up his shame and know that he was forgiven and loved.

Paul (first Saul) was on a rampage. He was on a campaign to eliminate followers of Jesus – to hunt them down and turn them over to harsh treatment and even death by religious rulers. He was on his way to a new city to carry out his campaign when a blinding light hit him, and Jesus called out to him, "Saul, Saul, *why are you persecuting me?*" When Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" the reply came, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting." Jesus then told Saul where to go for prayer and healing – and also spoke in a vision to Ananias, the one who was to take Saul in and pray with him (even though Ananias was afraid of Saul because of his reputation).

These are two powerful and direct questions by Jesus: *"Do you love me?"* and *"Why are you persecuting me?"* They get right to the heart.

And then, Jesus gets further to the heart with Peter. What follows is a no-holds-barred outright statement of the facts of life that Jesus says to Peter.

When you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.

Not knowing where we will be led – throughout our lives, despite all our plans and ambitions and efforts to control our paths – and even more as we get older and encounter growing limitations in body and

mind that join with the other limits and channels that have shaped our movement and led us along paths we may not have otherwise chosen.

We have faced the death of a number of wonderful folks recently. Three men, in just the past couple months – and one of them just this last week – made this long last journey. But their journey that they would not have chosen began for them quite a while ago. One does not choose Parkinson's Disease, or dementia, or cancer, or unrelenting infection.

I do not believe God lays out these circumstances or inserts them into people's lives. We have the bodies and minds and hearts that we have. We live in the world as it is now, in all its wonder and complexity and potential risk.

I do believe that, no matter what path we find ourselves on, no matter where we find ourselves led, we each hear Christ's invitation: *Follow me.*

What is the question that the risen Jesus has asked you at some point in your life?
What is the question that the risen Jesus may be asking you now in your life?

We do best not to let the heat of anger, the chill of fear, or the clamminess of shame and self-doubt get their grip on us – no matter what the forces around us may drive us toward.

This excerpt from a poem by the Jesuit, Luis Espinal, is quite good for us to take to heart.

> *There are Christians*
> *Who have hysterical reactions*
> *As if the world had slipped out of God's hands.*
> *They are violent*
> *As if they were risking everything.*
>
> *But we believe in history.*
> *The world is not a roll of the dice*
> *On its way toward chaos.*
> *A new world has begun to happen*
> *Since Christ has risen.*
>
> *Jesus Christ,*
> *We rejoice in your definitive triumph*
> *With our bodies still in the breach,*
> *Our souls in tension;*
> *We cry our first 'Hurrah!'*
> *Till eternity unfolds itself.*

May you be in continuing conversation with the risen Christ.