

April 14, 2013 Communion

What does your destiny look like? Do you know what's next in your life? As much as we like to plan, sometimes life is about hearing a call....an unexpected detour on the path. Today we'll hear about two men whose lives made an abrupt turn.

Acts 9: 1-6

The story of Paul's conversion on the Damascus Road is actually told three times in the Book of Acts. This is a sign of how important it was to Luke, the author. A lot of folklore has grown up around this event. You'll note, for instance, that Paul was NO knocked off a horse or donkey. Most scholars will argue that this is not even a story about conversion, because Paul never ceases to be a good Pharisee. Instead, scholars think this is a story about 'call' which means hearing Christ's invitation to live and act in a new way. Listen closely to the details.

¹All this time Saul was breathing down the necks of the Master's disciples, out for the kill. He went to the Chief Priest ²and got arrest warrants to take to the meeting places in Damascus so that if he found anyone there belonging to the Way, whether men or women, he could arrest them and bring them to Jerusalem.

³He set off. When he got to the outskirts of Damascus, he was suddenly dazed by a blinding flash of light. ⁴As he fell to the ground, he heard a voice: "Saul, Saul, why are you out to get me?"

⁵He said, "Who are you, Master?"

"I am Jesus, the One you're hunting down. ⁶I want you to get up and enter the city. In the city you'll be told what to do next."

John 21: 1a, 12-19

Scholars agree that this last chapter of the Gospel of John is the work of another writer. We know this because of the differences in vocabulary, grammar and style. The first verse is critical. We discover that the disciples have returned to their pre-Jesus lives. They are back fishing in Galilee as if nothing has changed. What follows is the powerful exchange between Jesus and Peter that sets out the next step for all the disciples: to follow the way of Jesus in the world. The way of Jesus is about love, justice, mercy and compassion: easier to say than to do.

¹Jesus appeared again to the disciples, this time at the Tiberias Sea (the Sea of Galilee).

¹²Jesus said, "Breakfast is ready." Not one of the disciples dared ask, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Master.

¹³Jesus then took the bread and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time Jesus had shown himself alive to the disciples since being raised from the dead.

¹⁵After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Master, you know I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶He then asked a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Master, you know I love you."

Jesus said, "Shepherd my sheep."

¹⁷Then he said it a third time: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, "Do you love me?" so he answered, "Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸I'm telling you the very truth now: When you were young you dressed yourself and went wherever you wished, but when you get old you'll have to stretch out your hands while someone else dresses you and takes you where you don't want to go." ¹⁹He said this to hint at the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. And then he commanded, "Follow me."

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Sermon – "Now what?"

When we think about Easter, I imagine most of us see it as a game changer for the world .

- Nothing was the same again
- People's lives were transformed... or were they?

You may have heard the expression: "same old, same old"

- It means, "nothing changes"

That's how both our scripture readings open today.

In Acts – Paul is continuing the job he'd been doing for 3 years. When he ran out of Christians to persecute in Jerusalem he jumped at the chance to take his Pharisaic justice on the road to Damascus -> the death and resurrection of Jesus hardly formed a blip in his packed schedule.

In John we're told that the disciples packed their bags, left Jerusalem and returned to the jobs they'd left 3 years earlier – making a living as fisherman on the Sea of Galilee.

Their intense spiritual experience clearly fizzled out like a sparkler on a birthday cake.

This begs the question: How did we get here?

Why didn't the story of Jesus fade like yet another of the countless folk tales and myths of that age?

The answer is simply – “call”

People show up in churches around the world or practice values handed down through generations of Christians or live in communities whose cultural norms and laws are based on Christianity because Paul & Peter were the first in a long line of people to understand themselves to be “called” by Jesus.

It happened to them as we heard in scripture today as it has happened to countless billions of believers who, at one moment, had an “aha” experience and said “Yes” to the call to “Follow me.”

No one plans it – but it changes our lives.

Life is full of surprises and serendipity. Being open to unexpected turns in the road is an important part of success. If you try to plan every step, you may miss those wonderful twists and turns. Just find your next adventure – do it well, enjoy it – and then, not now, think about that comes next. Condoleeza Rice quotes.

What’s next? What is the call? Now what?

Frank Crouch, Dean of Moravian Seminary in Pennsylvania –

Love is as love does. This is love as courage, love as risk, love as not wavering, regardless of what we are called to do. Christ calls Peter and us, as individuals and as communities of faith, to follow him even where we would not otherwise go, even where we might not want to go. The times in which we live are no time for “we have never done it that way before,” no time for returning to what we are used to. These times, more than ever, are times that call for the best love of God, friends, neighbours and enemies that we can muster. Workingpreacher.org

James Boyce, NT Professor, Luther Seminary Minnesota –

The story of Saul invites us to ponder how we will look at our own world when God takes our “no way” and our “we’ve never done that before” and transforms them into “yes.” Like Saul’s new vision, God rearranges our ways of seeing, being and acting. God changes our world.

That’s what lies ahead for us – it’s why we’re here and where we come from.