

Easter 3C, April 18, 2010

Lections: Acts 9:1-20; Ps. 30; Rev. 5:11-14; John 21: 1-19

Most of the lessons today give us portraits of everyday life and its infusion with God moments; one sermon title might be, 'astonish me, O God.' I seem to remember a poem with that line in it but my internet and book searches brought me no help. Nevertheless, it is how I see the texts for this morning – and how I have seen the week as well.

We might be tempted to say that Saul/Paul is not a very ordinary person or that because we are well aware of how his story turns around that he might not be like us; many of us have not had a dramatic Damascus Road experience where we have been knocked off a horse by God. Or maybe we have been. In my hospital visits this week lots of folks have been knocked off their horses and Andrew had a phone call from our crew chief in New Orleans that was distressing – the government funds have not come through and the crew chiefs will have to go home, leave 8 houses unfinished, and despair is again closing in. Unless they raise \$60,000 in three weeks. Yesterday in a diocesan workshop I was greeted with a comment that knocked me off the horse I rode in on.

We might not be breathing threats of murder or animosity but we – and others – have breathed despair and fear and we wonder if God will astonish us and do something that will bring blessing out of the upside down world. How will transformation happen? Who is the Ananias who might prove to be neighbor who gives us another chance, shows us another way? We are halfway to Pentecost where all sorts of neighbors will manifest God's spirit in diversity so perhaps we trust the horizon.

Paul had enough humility in his weakness to be shown the compassion and grace-filled mercy of a tentative befriending; Ananias had a Sabbath time vision that enabled him to reach out with love even to enemy. The psalmist had been through it too, a time of things getting bad, getting worse and then resolving. The psalm is filled with the ebb and flow of the life of faith with its choices of trust or despair. The person of faith chooses to trust a God who astonishes with blessing. The pace is almost too quick and sometimes our gratitude is fleeting as well. How will the psalmist live out the praise that has come when deliverance is sure?" How will the indicative move to the imperative?"

The disciples went fishing; they were knocked off their horses by the death of Jesus and emerged into a different reality. What happens when displaced people re-enter and re-engage a failed enterprise? How will reconstruction occur in their lives and for others? They did not know ahead of time what would be required and how God would astonish them.

The details in this gospel passage have been called quirky: not the usual bunch in the boat (some not fishermen), the exact number of fish, somebody naked then clothed, lambs and sheep and some powerful questions repeated as if the answers didn't satisfy. Oh, yes, and death foreshadowed. It is clear that the disciples were together – they needed to be together. There are powerful echoes of earlier feedings, other boat trips, fishing, catching and forgiving. Scholars can't decide if this is a postscript, an epilogue or was written by

another hand. We call this passage breakfast on the beach. Apparently recognition of Jesus would be followed by actions even if the disciples still need direction and a sense of his guiding presence. Undergirding it all is love, love of God's purpose above all else, for God will continually astonish.

Although the reading from Revelations doesn't come last in our hearing this morning, it is where I want to end for it speaks of worship which is crucial to all our tasks, an "act of communal imagination necessary for us to live out the new reality." Worship is where we are sourced, where we see that knowledge of God is an acknowledgment of neighbor, where love of God is love of neighbor, where God is neighbor to us and we didn't know it. This morning we release Monique, Chris and Lily and Rory from our weekly community; they have been bearers of faith who have enabled us to love more. Judah and Abby returned north to their Inuit home, having become neighbors during Holy Week and remain so even now. In hospitals and homes, in New Orleans, in diocesan gatherings, in our necessary meetings we have learned to love God who has reached us through neighbor. Astonishing us. We should say thanks for that.

#### Welcome Morning by Anne Sexton

"There is joy in all: in the hair I brush each morning, in the Cannon towel, newly washed, that I rub my body with each morning, in the chapel of eggs I cook each morning, in the outcry from the kettle that heats my coffee each morning, in the spoon and the chair that cry 'hello there Anne' each morning, in the godhead of the table that I set my silver, plate, cup upon each morning.

All this is God, right here in my pea green house each morning and I mean, though often forget, to give thanks, to faint down by the kitchen tavle in a prayr of rejoicing as the holy birds at the kitchen window peck into their marriage of seeds. So while I think of it, let me paint a thank-you on my palm for this, God, this laughter of the morning lest it go unspoken.

The joy that isn't shared, I've heard, dies young."

Amen+

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