

Sermon May 4, 2025

Acts 9:1-6

All this time Saul was breathing down the necks of the Master's disciples, out for the kill. He went to the Chief Priest and 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.

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

He said, "Who are you, Master?"

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

John 21:1-19 - Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 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.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net to 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 there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just

caught.' So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

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.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt 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. Very truly, I tell you, 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.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

Feed My Sheep

Today is a day of eyes wide open and new vision. Paul, who used to be Saul... the Pharisee who persecuted Jesus' earliest followers... who stood by as Stephen was stoned to death... who plotted to bring down as many more followers as possible. Paul who used to be Saul, who is literally blinded by the light, so that he can finally recognize the Risen Christ and accept his call to spread the Good News far and wide, helping to plant so many churches throughout the known world... ultimately making possible churches just like this one.

And Peter. Peter, who was with Jesus from the beginning but still could not quite see who Jesus really was.

Peter was just a simple fisherman with simple goals – catch enough fish to take care of his family, keep his head down if the Roman troops march

through town. I'm sure he wanted to maintain his faith and hope in God's promises, but he never thought his faith would be tested.

Peter's brother, Andrew, was actually the first person to encounter Jesus and accept his invitation to follow him. "You have to meet his guy!" he said to Peter, "I think he's the Messiah!" Peter sees what Andrew does and literally drops his nets to follow him. Soon he sees more than he could ever have imagined – the healings and the miracles and the teachings. The moments of glory on the mountaintop and gliding on surface of the water. Surely, he and his friends thought, this man who had clearly been sent and blessed by God would be the one to set the people free.

But, of course, there was more than they could understand, and as we know their dreams came crashing down. On a dark Friday night, their beloved leader died alone, and Peter denied even knowing him – not once, not twice, but three times.

That was probably the lowest point of his life.

But here we are... in the light of the resurrection. Peter has seen the Risen Christ... seen the wounds. But, he still doesn't know what to do. So he and his friends go back to what they know best. They pick up their nets and go fishing. After a night of catching absolutely nothing, they meet a stranger on shore at dawn. This man tells them to try again – in a new way – and immediately their nets are overflowing. Peter's eyes are opened, he recognizes that the stranger is Christ and jumps off the boat and swims to shore to greet his beloved leader. Mirroring those three denials, three times, Jesus asks him if Peter loves him. Three times he declares his love. Three times Jesus invites Peter to follow him... the same invitation that started their relationship, but now Peter understands what the stakes are. And he drops his nets and follows. To the ends of the age.

Paul and Peter. Different men and different experiences, but both saw the world in new ways as they chose to follow Jesus. The question for us today is what do we see? As the blinding light clears from our eyes, what does Christ call us to do – as individual and as a church.

The call is clear. We hear it in Jesus' invitation to Peter -

(tend) Care for... Feed... Follow... Love

The call is clear but the path isn't always as easy to find. Five years ago this weekend, I spent the day at a funeral. A young girl died of a heroin overdose – she had just turned 17 a few weeks earlier. I knew Christina for years. When she was little, she used to follow Meg around with an adoring look in her eyes, always wanting to be around the older girls in the neighborhood. I picture a little chubby girl who played on the tire swing in my backyard, a spunky girl who loved roller coasters and gymnastics. The last time I saw her, she was thin and drawn, with dark circles under her eyes. The last thing I remember saying to her was "you know that you are always welcome here, Sweetie." She gave me a quick hug and whispered, "I know," but I knew that we wouldn't see her again anytime soon. She was back in rehab within a week. And a few months later, her parents buried their only child. I sat heartbroken as her mother came into the church, stumbling and wailing in grief, and I sat helplessly as Meg and other young women I have known for years sat and grieved. I felt as if I had not done enough as a friend or a neighbor... but I'm not sure what else I could have done. As addiction hits epidemic proportions, I know the church hasn't done enough either, and the Body of Christ bears the wounds of Christina and all those who have had their world turned upside down by addiction.

The call is clear. And yet how often do we fail to honor Jesus' words to Peter?

Care for... Feed... Follow... Love.

In the coming weeks, I challenge each of us to look at what Christ is calling us to do as we follow him. Maybe it's reaching out to the Christinas of the world, maybe it's something else. We can only find out if we turn to the one who already bears the wounds of suffering and death. Then we can discern who is in need of our loving care? Who needs to be fed spiritually or physically? If we follow, where will Christ lead us

The call is clear. The light has cleared our eyes so we can see the path

Care for... Feed...Follow...Love...

Will you join me on the Way?