



“An Encounter with Jesus”

Third Sunday of Easter
Saturday and Sunday, May 4–5, 2019
All Services
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Acts 9:1-6; John 21:1-19

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

In the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain, Derrick Redmond, a top sprinter from Great Britain, rounded the curve of the 400-meter semifinals. All of a sudden, he heard a loud “pop” and fell to the track. He would later say that he thought he had been shot. . . He got up, holding his thigh, he had torn his hamstring muscle. He started to hobble toward the finish line, but he could barely move. Race officials came out on to the track to help him, but he waved them off, so determined he was to finish the race.

Then a man came out of the stands. It was Derrick Redmond's father. Waving off security, he ran to his son, put his arm around him and helped him limp to the finish line.

Afterwards a reporter asked the father, “Why did you do that? Why did you leave the stands and come to your son?” And he said, “Because we started this together, and we are going to finish this together.”

In the Bible there are 13 post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. On Easter morning the women believers are the first to encounter Jesus and tell the disciples. Most of these encounters with the risen Lord happened within the 40 days between the resurrection and the ascension. Many happened in and around Jerusalem. Several of them happened in Galilee, including one where Jesus appeared to over 500 believers, and some of them happened after the ascension, Saint Paul for example.

The appearances were multiple events witnessed by multiple people at different times by people with varying strengths of faith. And today we hear of one such encounter with the risen Lord.

In Chapter 13 of John's gospel, Peter insists that he will remain loyal to Jesus. He promises to go where ever he goes, even to death, laying down his life for Jesus!

Then in Chapter 18, Jesus is arrested and taken to the house of the High Priest for a rushed, sham trial. Peter follows the crowd in the courtyard and is challenged by bystanders three times. Three times he's asked if he is a disciple of Jesus. And three times Peter denies that he even knows him.

When Jesus is on the cross dying, Peter, along with many of the other disciples are nowhere to be found.

And then the women disciples encounter Jesus at the empty tomb and announce his resurrection to the disciples. In John's gospel, the announcement serves as a starter guns of sort, as the beloved disciple John and Peter get into a foot race to see who can get to the empty tomb first.

Later that night Jesus appears to the disciples offering his Spirit and peace. A week later, another encounter as Jesus allays the uncertainty of Thomas. And now in Chapter 21, the disciples. . . go fishing.

Hesitant, unsure, confused they go back what is most familiar to them, they go fishing. Maybe they wanted to get on with their life, maybe they wanted a sense of normalcy and comfort. After all, they had families to look after. Maybe it was time for them just to settle down and do something sensible for a change, and this was the world that they knew.

The great spiritual experience of Easter fades and they return to a more familiar life. Peter and the other disciples aren't that much different from us. I've known so many people in the course of my ministry who after having an intense spiritual experience return back to their old lives, the same lives that they always had.

So, Peter and his friends go back to fishing. But without Jesus, it's not going very well. After a whole night of fishing, they're left with empty nets as a fisherman, I know the feeling!

Have you ever been there? A time in life of empty nets? Maybe you tried starting a new business and failed. Or perhaps you landed the job of your dreams, but it didn't work out. Or maybe you had the perfect marriage, but it fell apart. Or you have health problems that keep you from doing the things in life that you wanted to do.

Peter thought his life was going to be different. He had been invited by Jesus to fish for people. He saw great deeds of power, experienced miracles, had tender moments with Jesus as well as being challenged by him. Peter was Jesus' right hand man, he was his rock, and together they were going to do amazing things. But now all he has is an empty net and burdened soul of a person who had refused to acknowledge his friend, his rabbi, his Lord.

Then from the light of the early morning a voice calls out from the shore. Like Mary in the garden, they didn't know it was him. But soon they did. Jesus calls to them "cast the net to the other side. . .", and dutifully they obey the voice of Jesus and a miracle occurs. They succeed, abundantly and they recognize that Jesus is in their midst.

And Peter, the Rock, who had unfinished business with Jesus, jumps in the water, impulsive as ever.

On the shore he encounters the Lord who prepared breakfast, cooked fish and bread. Did you notice that Jesus didn't even need their catch of fish? And Peter who three times had denied knowing Jesus, now has the opportunity three times to affirm him. Jesus asks Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" Maybe Jesus was pointing out the boat or the fishing equipment, or the other disciples or family members that happen to be on the shore. "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Peter responds. Jesus says to him "Feed my lambs." "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus says to him, "Tend my sheep." A third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" and Peter responds perhaps with more urgency, or perhaps even frustration: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." And in that moment Peter the fisherman, becomes Peter the shepherd.

Encounters with Jesus brings healing. Encounters with Jesus brings forgiveness and restoration. Encounters with Jesus changes us to the very core of our being. Peter embraced the love and forgiveness of Jesus and would never be the same again. He lived his life as he wrote in the first letter of Peter to "believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy."

Such is the love offered to you today, in holy Word and Meal. It offers healing, forgiveness, and restoration. The love Jesus speaks to Peter, and to you and to me involves us doing something. It is courageous and it takes risks. This love changes us.

The kind of love that Jesus gives you is meant to be given away. If you hold on to it and don't share it, it will never have the impact that Jesus intended. If you want to show the world how much you love Jesus and how Jesus loves you, how you are precious to God, then do something! Love the stranger and the outcast.

If you want to show how much the church means to you. How you love this congregation, just do something! Be generous toward its ministry without condition and feed the poor.

If you want to show how strong your faith is, how much the power of resurrection life lives in you, just do something! Forgive and love each other.

We run the race with Jesus our Lord and Savior. "We started this together, and we will finish this together." Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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