**First Reading Acts 9:1-20**

*Saul (later called Paul) was an ardent persecutor of all who followed the Way of Christ. This reading recounts the story of his transformation beginning with an encounter with Jesus Christ on the way to Damascus.*

1 Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” 5 He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless be cause they heard the voice but saw no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” 11 The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” 13 But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; 14  and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.” 15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; 16 I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” 17 So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18  And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he ` regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, 20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”

**Psalm 30**

1 I will exalt you, O Lord, because you have lifted me up and have not let my enemies triumph over me. 2O Lord my God, I cried out to you, and you restored me to health. 3You brought me up, O Lord, from the dead; you restored my life as I was going down to the grave. 4Sing praise to the Lord, all you faithful; give thanks in holy remembrance. R 5God’s wrath is short; God’s favor lasts a lifetime. Weeping spends the night, but joy comes in the morning. 6While I felt secure, I said, “I shall never be disturbed. 7You, Lord, with your favor, made me as strong as the mountains.” Then you hid your face, and I was filled with fear. 8I cried to you, O Lord; I pleaded with my Lord, saying, 9 “What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you or declare your faithfulness? 10 Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me; O Lord, be my helper.” 11 You have turned my wailing into dancing; you have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy. 12 Therefore my heart sings to you without ceasing; O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever.

**Second Reading Revelation 5:11-14**

*The vision of John recorded in Revelation offers a glimpse of cosmic worship around the throne. At its center is “the Lamb who was slain.”*

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 singing with full voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” 13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” 14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the elders fell down and worshipped.

**Gospel John 21:1-19**

*The risen Christ appears again to his disciples by the sea where they were first called. After echoes of the fishing and feeding miracles, he gives a final reminder of the cost of a disciple’s love and obedience.*

1 After he appeared to his followers in Jerusalem, Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 2 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. 3 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. 4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” 6 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. 7 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 sea. 8 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. 9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 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. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. 15 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.” 16 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.” 17 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. 18 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.”19 He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God. After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

**Sermon**

This week we continue exploring what resurrection life actually is…what did Christ’s resurrection mean for our everyday lives? And today I’m going to do what I only do once in a while anymore…that is to draw from 2 of our Scripture passages assigned for the day. Within the Acts passage and the John passage, I see 3 people on whom the resurrection had a major impact. They are Saul, Annanias and Peter. Today we are going to talk about what that impact is and how that connects with our lived experience.

We will begin with Saul, since he comes up first in our Scriptures. Saul is a persecutor of the followers of Jesus at this particular point in the story. Acts 9 begins by spelling this out, which actually has quite a dramatic impact on the story: “Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” The phrase “the Way” is a phrase used to describe those who were following the teachings of Jesus. Saul was a threat to those who followed Jesus. At this point in the story, Saul is terrorizing Jesus’ followers. In the previous chapter, he oversaw the stoning death of a Jesus follower named Stephen. Now he is actively searching out followers of Jesus and plans to tie them up and bring them back to Jerusalem.

But boy was Saul stopped in his tracks. While he is on his way to kidnap Christians in Damascus, he is brought to the ground by a bright light and a voice that seemed to come from nowhere. This encounter with the risen Christ changes everything for Saul. In this encounter, he is not only stopped dead in his tracks. When he hears the risen Christ basically introduce himself, he is confronted with the fact that the people he was persecuting were actually right. He is confronted with the fact that he was opposing, fighting against God. So quite possibly it was a merciful thing that he had to stay put for 3 days as he contemplated what this all meant going forward.

What do we learn about resurrection life from Saul’s experience? That no one is beyond the reach of the mercy of God. That, regardless of what we’ve done in our past, the risen Christ invites us all into the mission to proclaim the good news, to inspire others in their faith, to care for our neighbors in need. That sometimes God is at work in our lives by confronting us with our incorrect beliefs and understandings.

While we often refer to this passage as the conversion of Saul or Paul, as he is later called, we could also consider it the story of the conversion of Ananias. Ananias has to take an enormous leap of faith in this story. Ananias knows all about Saul including the fact that Saul is coming to Damascus to carry off more followers of Jesus. But the risen Christ tells him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” So, knowing all he had heard about Saul and knowing what the risen Christ revealed to him now, he goes, as he is told. When he lays his hands on Saul, he calls him, “Brother Saul,” and he heals him.

How hard it must have been for Annanias, knowing all that Saul had done, to call him “brother.” And that is a challenge of living the resurrection life. Since no one is beyond the reach of the mercy of God, Christ helps us to see beyond their blunders, shortcomings or even completely problematic behavior in the past to call them brother…sister…sibling…one who joins us in relationship in the family of God through the risen Christ.

And now we turn to the passage from John to the story of Peter. Today’s passage is the 3rd time Jesus has appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. And for whatever reason, at this point Peter and the others with him decide to go fishing. Most likely, this wasn’t a fishing trip like we take these days for sport and enjoyment. Fishing was their trade. They fished to make a living. So they are out of the locked room, the risen Christ has appeared to them, and now they are going fishing.

Of course, you heard the reading, Christ appears on the shore, tells them to lower their nets on the right side of the boat, they haul in over 100 fish and Peter swims to shore. And then we get to it…the 3 questions that Christ asks Peter as they sit around the fire eating their fish and bread. “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these…Simon son of John, do you love me…Simon son of John, do you love me?” Each time, Peter responds in the affirmative. Now, those who study these things very closely have taken note to the similar words used to describe the fire as a “charcoal fire” both here and in the scene during the Passion Narrative when Peter denies Jesus 3 times. So many scholars have pointed to this conversation as Peter’s opportunity to cancel out his denials with the affirmations that he does love Jesus.

But in response to Peter’s affirmative answers Jesus calls Peter to a new trade, a new vocation as we also call it…feed my lambs…tend my sheep…feed my sheep. In John 10, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd and here, before Christ’s bodily presence leaves the world, he hands over the ministry of caring for, feeding people to his followers. While Peter does play a prominent role in this ministry in the first half of the book of Act, we certainly know that Peter represents all followers of Jesus who will come after him.

Once again, for Peter, resurrection life is an opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation, without dwelling on the mistakes of the past. And closely following the reconciled relationship is Christ’s call to the vocation of caring for, feeding all people. In the stories of all 3 of these men today, we recognize that resurrection life is first and foremost about Christ reconciling humanity in relationship to God regardless of what we have done. We cannot be beyond Christ’s reach…no one is beyond Christ’s reach.

Resurrection life also means viewing people as not beyond Christ’s reach. As we hear the call to ministry in these stories today, it is a reminder that the risen Christ is not only at work among those who are regular worshippers or Bible study attendees…Christ is at work among those who have fallen from grace as we say these days, those who don’t like Christianity, those who have no thought of religion, those who have no thought about what is right and wrong, those who have right and wrong mixed up. And resurrection life is that reality that says, Christ is the one who creates faith, who brings healing to a person’s heart, who changes hearts, including ours. Resurrection life, the risen Christ, only calls us share the good word, to care for, tend, feed all those for whom he died. Amen.