

Lutheran Church of the Master  
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188  
Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor  
April 17/18, 2010  
Third Sunday of Easter

***“Fishing – Following – Feeding”***

*Resurrection also means reconciliation. In today's gospel, Peter's denials are trumped by a threefold commissioning from Jesus. We, too, are reconciled to one another and to God as we join in the hymn of all creation with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!" Normally the church would celebrate the feast of St. Mark on this date, but since nothing displaces a Sunday of Easter, his festival is transferred to tomorrow.*

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Eternal and all-merciful God, with all the angels and all the saints we laud your majesty and might. By the resurrection of your Son show yourself to us and inspire us to follow Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, whom with you and the Holy Spirit we worship and praise, one God, now and forever. **C Amen.**

**FIRST READING** Acts 9:1–6 [7–20]

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" <sup>5</sup> He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup> But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." <sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." <sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> 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." <sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; <sup>14</sup> and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." <sup>15</sup> 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; <sup>16</sup> I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." <sup>17</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, <sup>20</sup> and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

**PSALM**      *Psalm 30*

I will exalt you, O LORD, because you have lift- | ed me up\*  
and have not let my enemies triumph | over me.

**<sup>2</sup>O LORD my God, I cried | out to you,\*  
and you restored | me to health.**

<sup>3</sup>You brought me up, O LORD, | from the dead;\*  
you restored my life as I was going down | to the grave.

**<sup>4</sup>Sing to the LORD, you ser- | vants of his;\*  
give thanks for the remembrance | of his holiness.    R**

<sup>5</sup>For his wrath endures but the twinkling | of an eye,\*  
his favor | for a lifetime.

**<sup>6</sup>Weeping may | spend the night,\*  
but joy comes | in the morning.**

<sup>7</sup>While I felt secure, I said, "I shall never | be disturbed.\*  
You, LORD, with your favor, made me as strong | as the mountains."

**<sup>8</sup>Then you | hid your face,\*  
and I was | filled with fear.    R**

<sup>9</sup>I cried to | you, O LORD;\*  
I pleaded with | the LORD, saying,

**<sup>10</sup>"What profit is there in my blood, if I go down | to the pit?\*"  
Will the dust praise you or de- | clare your faithfulness?**

<sup>11</sup>Hear, O LORD, and have mer- | cy upon me;\*  
O LORD, | be my helper."

**<sup>12</sup>You have turned my wailing | into dancing;\*  
you have put off my sackcloth and clothed | me with joy.**

<sup>13</sup>Therefore my heart sings to you | without ceasing;\*  
O LORD my God, I will give you | thanks forever.    R

**SECOND READING**      *Revelation 5:11–14*

<sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> 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!"

<sup>13</sup> 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!"

<sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

**GOSPEL**     *John 21:1-19*

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

<sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> 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." <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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." <sup>19</sup> (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

If you were to paint a picture of God in which you portray how God relates to people like you and me, what kind of picture would you paint? Regardless how you depict God, where would you put God in relation to men and women and trees and elephants and rivers and planets?

One of the ways we think about God is above it all and over it all. In that picture, God would be up there ... over there ... somewhat out of touch with ... standing perhaps as a judge over ... you and me and trees and elephants and rivers and planets. Church architecture has often

reflected that ... God is way up there ... on the other side of the altar railing seen as a fence to keep God in and you and me out (unless you're ordained, then it is OK to go into the other side). We see this in the temple that David finally built ... with the holy of holies containing the ark ... and the courtyards which only the priests could enter ... and the areas where only the men could enter ... and the women were to be kept out entirely! We see it in ancient cathedrals sometimes with tall screens dividing the high altar from those kneeling penitents out there ... God is mysterious, totally different, not wanting to mix it up with dirty mortals like us.

But there is another picture ... the one in *Genesis* where God is walking in the garden enjoying creation ... wanting to converse with man and with woman ... the God who, in *Exodus*, went before the people to lead them, came up behind them to protect them, and when the camp was resting, the tent of Jahweh was right in the middle with three tribes east of it, three tribes west of it, three tribes north of it, and three tribes south of it. *Exodus* tells us that God likes to be in the middle of the people of God! Modern churches proclaim this with the altar often in the middle of the sanctuary ... with no altar railing around it to look like a fence keeping God in or men, women, and children out ... in other words, we could probably say that God gets bored of being in church all the time too ... God wants ... God needs to be out in the midst of the people of God because God is love ... and God wants to love people like us and through us.

That is why Jesus calls us today to follow him. We often talk about worshipping God ... and that is easy to do on the basis of Scripture ... you can't read the Bible without realizing that worship has always been simply a part of the game. People who love God gather at least on a weekly basis in worship ... first of all, because it was God's idea to be here and the work of the Holy Spirit to gather us here.

But something else is also God's idea ... and that is that the ones who gather here are also the ones who scatter to love the world to Jesus! It is so clear that Jesus loved the world ... he loved to sit with children, he loved to heal the sick, he loved to challenge the scholars, he loved to feed hungry people, he loved to care for the grieving (even by bringing the dead back to life), he seemed to have a love for nature (he could look at a bush and turn it into a sermon), he loved to take what was and make it better. When we talk about this, we're saying that Jesus was a servant ... which leads us to conclude that if we are to follow Jesus (the one we worship), we also need to be involved in serving the world.

Jesus could have just said: GO! He could have just done what I so often hear people talking about ... every now and then we will share with a rather proud voice that we "delegated that to someone else." Well, you know, delegation is connected to power and to authority. I can delegate something to you if I have power over you ... if I have authority over you ... if I am in control. Delegation is, what I like to call, a "C" word ... a Control word. And Jesus certainly could have used that language in this lesson ... but he didn't.

Instead, Jesus was in the middle of his disciples ... he said he was going fishing ... he neither asked them to go along nor encouraged them ... and they simply said "we're coming with you." In the morning after the fishing trip has apparently proven fruitless ... or fishless ... Jesus asks where their fish are ... and suggests that they throw their nets on the other side of the boat ... and their fish nets almost break as they pull in 153 LARGE fish. Then they have breakfast ... that Jesus fixes for them ... they ask who HE is (this is a post-resurrection story) ... and Jesus asks Peter three times if he (Peter) loves him (Jesus) ... thereby giving Peter a chance to get over his denying of Jesus three times between the Garden event on Maundy Thursday and the Crucifixion Event on Good Friday.

And then Jesus says: FOLLOW ME. In order to follow someone, that person has to be leading. Jesus is not delegating ... he is demonstrating for his disciples

... just like he has been doing since Bethlehem

... just like he has been doing since the temple at the age of 12

... just like he has been doing since he invited each of the 12 to follow him

... just like he was doing that week before the Crucifixion

... just like he did at that meal ... when he instituted two things: a meal that we share today ... and a basin of water with the towel kneeling before them washing their feet: the role of the servant.

In a former congregation, we were working with a consultant in reviewing the ministry and ministries in which we were involved ... and in renewing and redoing our plans for ongoing and future ministry. One of the things we realized is that, as is often the case, 90% of the congregation's ministry was being accomplished by 10% of the congregation's members ... with some seemingly involved in everything and many seemingly involved in nothing ... and in a slide about decision making she said that one of the statements that should determine how our congregation spends its time is this: "Laity should wear only 1 ministry hat (Worship is 1 plus 2 more: service and spiritual growth)." In other words, once again worship is central ... but in addition to worship, we should seek to equip each member to be engaged in one servant ministry ... and in addition, each member should be involved in one specific area by which his or her faith is being expanded ... the area of spiritual growth.

So this morning, I want to ask you what your defined area is when it come to this area of service where we are invited to follow Jesus ... you know, the "sheep and the goats" of Matthew 25. And remember, Jesus words to the "goats" advising them that because they failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, they

failed to do it to him ... and then they are herded to their eternal doom. There are probably a lot of folks who thought they were good church members in that herd going off to doom ... what a surprise it must have been. And what a surprise it doesn't need to be! Like lung cancer because you chose to smoke; like AIDS because you chose to participate in unprotected sex; like a heart attack because you go around angry all the time or carry too much weight with you as you go; like being arrested for homicide because you decided to drive drunk ... these words could be avoided. There is no reason to hear: "because you didn't do ONE OF THESE THINGS TO THE LEAST OF THEM, you didn't do it for me.

This is especially sad when we realize that in the first place, God wired us through our spiritual gifts to do at least one of these things. From the very beginning of Christianity as a distinct religious community this was one of its defining trademarks: Christians were known for loving and caring for other people outside of their own communities ... their love was for all ... from the lepers outside of the city walls to the poor homeless in Iran and Iraq today ... political enemies are still brothers and sisters in Christ ... and Christians have always been there.

Are you aware of some of the ministries we do together through this congregation? Like most ELCA congregations, we could probably lump our service ministries under five headings: hunger ministries, health ministries, human rights and justice ministries, housing/shelter ministries, and Stephen Ministry.

(By the way, Jesus' words in Matthew 25 could be massaged into these five areas:

Hunger: "I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink."

Health: "I was sick and you stopped to visit."

Human rights and justice ministries: "I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Housing/Shelter ministries: "I was homeless and you gave me a room, I was shivering and you gave me clothes."

Stephen Ministry: training for caregivers in all of these areas ... and more.

I wonder this morning if we have champions for these areas of ministry and or specific ministries as listed. For which of these are you willing to say "Here am I ... let me go with you!" In a congregation as large as ours, we should have small groups of advocates in each of these areas ... and we do have some ... but I have a hunch that we have the potential to have many more ...

And chances are that you could add one or more to the list ... service areas that you are involved in that could increase the network of ministry in that area ...and perhaps a brother or sister here would be willing to join that effort if he/she knew what it is.

If there is an area of service that you would like to become involved in, would you please send me a text, an email, leave a voice message, or put a note in my box ... include your name, telephone number, cellphone number, and email address ... and let us know which area you're already serving in or interested in serving in. If you can identify the specific ministry (like "The Chicago Ecumenical Night Ministry"), that would be great. But if you can just identify "Health Ministry" or "Human Rights and Justice Ministries" that would be so helpful.

I'm asking you to consider committing less than three % of your time to specific Christian actions in your life. (Each week:  $24 \times 7 = 168$  hours  $\times$  3% = 5.04 hours.) I'm asking for one hour in worship (and remember ... that is the central pivotal hour without which I'm not sure you should venture into either of the others. There should be no one teaching

Sunday School who is not in worship ... there should be no one serving in the food pantry who is not in worship ... spiritual growth and service cannot happen without worship at the center!) ... two hours in specific congregationally related service and two hours in specific congregationally related spiritual growth.

Imagine that ... I think we should have over 700 people gathered in worship each weekend (or other days if necessary) ...over 700 people doing just one specific thing for a couple hours each week (like serving food at soup kitchen or getting ready for the next CROP walk or writing letters to State Senators on behalf of the housing issues or staffing a PADS shelter in a neighboring congregation or maybe even our own?) ... and over 700 people individually coming together in small groups in homes or in spaces here at the church for the specific purpose of a couple hours of faith development, Biblical formation, spiritual gift discernment, and prayer.

When you think about it, 3% a week is certainly better than the eternal alternative! And, once again, as I always say when it comes the stewardship of our lives, of our living, and of our money ... imagine what a tithe of 10% could do (=168 hrs/week X 10% = 16.8 hrs/week!)