

Year C
Third Sunday of Easter
Acts 9:1-6
Psalm 30
Revelation 5:11-end
John 21:1-19

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Have you ever experienced déjà-vu? That sensation that you have lived through this moment before. Apparently, all of us will experience it at least once in our lives. You might be experiencing it now, that sensation of living through the dread of a preacher's slow climb into the pulpit! If you're here this morning because you've had a baptism or a wedding in the family in the last year or so you might be feeling déjà-vu, or re-experiencing the feelings of joy, nerves, complete confusion or whatever else might have been going on that day. And whilst there are many theories on what causes déjà-vu (trust me I've been down the google rabbit hole, so you don't have to) it is most commonly described as, "I've been here before."

I've been here before, that is where meet St Peter this morning. The reading from our Gospel of John is quite irritating in many ways. The style of writing slightly changes and instead of explaining things matter-of-factly, which to be fair John struggles to do at the best of times, he draws out this episode, or multi-episodes. He gives a lot of small, seemingly unnecessary, and even

strange details. John could just have easily said, “While the disciples were fishing, they saw Jesus on the shore. This was his third appearance.” But he didn’t. Instead, John focuses on the details in which Jesus showed himself: why they went fishing, no catch, the numbers of fish, Peter being naked, the breakfast of bread and fish which reads like the most awkward morning-after-the-night-before breakfast in history, and the coal fire.

The coal fire – I have been here before. I wonder how much adrenaline was coursing through Peter as he reaches the shore. Fed up with being stuck in a room with so many questions he has gone back to what he knows best, fishing, only to find that he seems to have lost his skill. And then to be greeted again by the risen Jesus who somehow commands a miraculous catch of fish and invites them to breakfast. How Peter’s heart must have been racing as he rushes ashore pulling on clothes and then stops short as he sees the coal fire. I have been here before.

I wonder if he gazed into the flames, lost himself in the past, and remembered that other charcoal fire, the one by which he warmed himself and denied Jesus (John 18:17-18). I wonder if Peter heard the cock crow its exclamation point to his three denials of Jesus, its exclamation point to his guilt. I wonder if he

was overcome with regret. I wonder if he was afraid. I wonder if he relived that night thinking, “If only....”

There is a clue to what Peter is thinking in one of the other strange and seemingly needless details in this account. As soon as Jesus is recognized naked Peter gets dressed and jumps in the water. We probably could have gone a long time without needing to know that Peter was naked. And yet, John begins the gospel with creation allusions, “in the beginning ...”. And if we recall the creation account Adam and Eve are naked and feel no shame, they don’t seek to hide their nakedness until shame sets in after disobeying God. It wouldn’t be beyond John to hope that we might see in Peter’s sudden clothing of himself a reaction to the shame that still clouds him after his denial.

Whatever Peter might have been thinking or feeling and whatever guilt or shame he might have been feeling, are silenced by Jesus showing himself and saying, “Come and have breakfast.”

After that very awkward, silent breakfast, where Jesus produces fish that they haven’t caught, Jesus and Peter go on a walk. And Jesus asks Peter the same question three times. Now we can get very clever here and see the word play that John uses with the different Greek words for love and sheep, or we can

see the man who followed Jesus for three years, who declared his unwavering loyalty to death one minute and denied Jesus three times the next, squirming as Jesus asks him bluntly, “do you love me?” Not, “will you serve me?”, nor, “will you lead my Church?” but simply, “do you love me?” Three times, do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?

I have been here before.

I do not know him. Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.

I have never seen this man. Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.

I tell you I do not know him. Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.

One question for each of Peter’s denial. Three times Peter gives the same answer, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” And I think he did. I think Jesus knew that Peter loved him, but Peter needed to know that he loved Jesus.

Peter needed to understand that he was not bound to or identified by his past.

A few years after this, when Peter is leading the fledgling Church, the greatest threat to that Church will be thrown off a horse, into the mud and asked a different question, “why are you persecuting me?” This will be St Paul’s déjà-vu moment which he will relive constantly, we will read it three times alone in the Book of Acts. This moment that changes Saul into Paul, persecutor into Apostle, zealot into martyr. The moment he will look back on at the end of

his life and ministry, I have been here before, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst, he will write.

These 50 days of Easter often feel like déjà-vu because we are brought back time and again to the resurrection accounts in John, to the ways in which Jesus shows himself. To the details of the disciples' routine lives. Because resurrection does not happen apart from the routines of life but in them. Resurrection is not about escaping life but about becoming alive.

Resurrection is in the details. That's true in today's gospel and in our lives. That's why we have the sacraments, very physical details in our very physical lives all pointing us to the resurrection. Baptism in which we participate in Christ's death and resurrection; marriage in which we build a life built on Christ's life-giving love for the Church; the Eucharist in which Christ says, "come and eat and live." In the sacraments we discover that we have a future, our life has been guaranteed by Christ's life, and he has shown himself to us.

How many of us also need to hear, understand, and experience that again and again as if for the very first time? Jesus shows himself to us in the charcoal fires of our guilt, regrets, and betrayals. Those fires, however, have been extinguished and a new fire kindled. That's true for Peter, for you, and for me.

The Bread of Life himself has prepared a place for us at the table. The last supper has become the first breakfast and the charcoal fire of denial has become a charcoal fire of welcome and invitation. What looked like endings have become new beginnings through baptism, the Eucharist, marriage. And in the other sacraments of confirmation, reconciliation, healing and last rites, and ordination.

I have been here before. Even if we have, we are invited back again this morning to the fire, to the question, do you love me? And even if we have answered it before we are invited to answer it again. To re-affirm the vows we may have made at baptism, or marriage; at confirmation or ordination. And even if we haven't been here before, like Paul, this can be our déjà-vu moment, the moment we look back on when we know that something shifted, that resurrection life started to take hold in our own lives. And whatever the coal-fires of our own lives, of our own memories are showing us, this is the moment we can put them behind us. As we receive the sacrament again, so we receive the resurrection life Jesus offers us where everything is made new.

Both Peter and Paul don't get off the hook that lightly, both are given a mission, both are sent to lead, to love and to proclaim. Resurrection life cannot be kept to ourselves. So first we come and receive and then we go and

give, that is always the case with sacraments. In baptism we are given candles and told to go and shine; in marriage we exchange rings as a promise of the life-giving vows; we are told to go and live out the love we have received.

I have been here before. Whether we are recalling baptisms, weddings, confirmations, ordinations, or whatever else it might be this morning we are invited to relive and reconfirm those life-giving moments. To receive what we need to get rid of the things that would stop us living into the resurrection life and to take hold of the life we are offered. To hear again and again the call of Christ to follow him, to be loved by him, and to love through him. That is the only déjà-vu moment we need.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!