

John 21:1-9 Easter 3/May 1, 2022

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

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is the third Sunday of Easter, the 15th day of the 50 days of Easter. Today we remember that Christ is risen, and that that's not the end of the story.

The Easter story doesn't end with Jesus risen from the dead. In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God does forgive the sins of the world, but it doesn't stop there. The resurrection is only the beginning of the good news of reconciliation for sake of the world, because the act of reconciliation has to be shared. So, it is the mission of the Church. It is the good news that we are sent to share with everyone, just like Jesus did.

The story of reconciliation after the resurrection included Jesus going to those who had abandoned him and he brings them peace. Jesus visits Thomas and shows him his wounds. Jesus shows up at Peter's workplace where he is fishing for fish, instead of people, and Jesus is reconciled with him right there, restoring their relationship, assuring Peter that he is forgiven and loved, and then he sends Peter to go share that good news with others. To stop fishing for fish and go fish for people. Go feed the sheep!

Shortly after that Paul, who was busy killing off Christians, is reconciled as well. His story doesn't end with death, with killing, instead Ananias is sent to reconcile Paul to the Church, and because of that Paul becomes the greatest apostle of them all.

The basic premise is that reconciliation is catchy. It leads to more reconciliation, and that's what the resurrection is all about! We are reconciled with God so that we can be reconciled with one another.

So, after the resurrection and the reconciliation, Jesus asks a really important question, not only to Peter, but to all of his followers – Now that our relationship is restored, do you really love me?

Three times Jesus asks Peter – Do you love me? That's exactly how many times Peter denied knowing Jesus before the crucifixion. And three times Peter affirms his love for Jesus. He affirms that he does know Jesus. And three times Jesus is making it clear that love is active. It's not just an emotion. Love makes you do things – like be crucified.

So, Jesus is asking Peter, now that you know the full story, now that you really do know me entirely, are you willing to go act on my behalf. "Do you love me?"

Before the resurrection, Jesus is seen as a prophet, a healer, someone who casts out demons and brings people back to life, the Messiah in a militaristic way, but now, in the resurrection, Jesus' true identity is known completely. He is more than just what they had thought. He is actually the victor over sin and death. He is God's creating Word.

To know Jesus after the resurrection is much different than knowing him beforehand. After the resurrection Jesus has to ask all of his followers, "How do you like me now?! You loved me before, but now what do you think? Do you love me now? Will you continue the work that I started?"

That's the question that is set on us in Baptism. Do you love me? In Baptism, we proclaim, "Yes." Then filled with the Holy Spirit and sealed with the cross of Christ forever, with Jesus' death and resurrection, we go feed God's sheep. Loved we go love.

Love is active and alive, and catchy.

At the sea shore Peter is asked, "Do you love me now that you know the whole story?" And then Jesus tells him, "Now go take care of my sheep. Only with the resurrection can you truly take care of others by constantly reminding them of my love, the whole story of my love, which includes life, death, and resurrection."

And so, every time we have communion, the sheep are fed, enabling the good news to continually be alive, active, and at work here and now. So, if we truly love Jesus, we can't help but act right here and right now doing God's will of love in the world, which sounds easy enough. But, for most of the apostles loving Jesus meant being killed for the proclamation of the good news of God's unconditional unending love.

Powerful people would much prefer for hate to roam the world instead of love, and they will do their best to silence love, because when love is on the loose, out of the tomb, it cannot be controlled. It's too busy setting people free and giving hope.

Love causes people to live boldly in the midst of threats and fear. Love makes you do "crazy things," because love is not about self-preservation, love is all about the good of others.

Peter is the first on record to be asked, "Do you love me?" But, as we see in the other readings for today – Ananias, Paul, John of Patmos, and all believers are asked that same question in their own time and place. Do you love me? Because if you do, then you will burst out from all of your fears in order to make the way for love.

In the Acts reading we have for today, Ananias is asked by Jesus to go see Saul, soon to be renamed Paul.

You'll remember that Saul was very busy killing Christians, so you can only imagine that Ananias was very leery of going to see him, not only for his own safety, but for the safety of all the Christians in the area.

Jesus asks Ananias – “Do you love me? Then go see Paul and heal him on my behalf.” Ananias is asked to put aside all of his own feelings of dismay, anger, fear, and betrayal in order to do God's work, to reconcile Paul and bring him into the fold.

I can only imagine what everyone was saying to Ananias. “Are you crazy? He's out to kill us!” But, Ananias loves Jesus, he trusts Jesus, and so he goes to feed the sheep, first Paul and then through Paul millions of others.

Thanks to Paul, we have a lot of letters that we continue to read today in order to know God better. For nearly 2000 years we have been reading what he wrote. We only hear from Ananias this one time here in Acts, but it's significant. Without Ananias loving Jesus and doing God's will, even if it was against his better judgment, we might not even be sitting here today, because without Ananias there would be no Paul, without Paul there would be no Augustine, and without Augustine there would be no Luther.

Jesus asks us, “Do you love me? Will you go where I send you? Do you trust me?”

And then he sends us on his way to go and feed all people with the good news of God's reconciling love, because it really does make a difference in the world. It does. That's why Jesus came for us and that is the mission of the Church which he is sending us to do, to participate in his work in the full assurance of the resurrection.

God is love and love is action. We see that action in the whole story of Jesus – His birth, his healing and teaching, his death and resurrected, his ascension into heaven, and his sending the Holy Spirit to be with us, which then enlivens us to go out into the world to be God's reconciling love, to be the resurrection in action here and now.

“Do you love me?” If our answer to Jesus is yes, then that means that we act here and now for the wellbeing of others. We love God by loving those who are in need of the good news through our actions – feeding, clothing, building, visiting, crying, baking, advocating, praying... living the love here and now.

Jesus asks, “Do you love me?” If your answer is yes, then what do you have to be afraid of? The tomb is empty!

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Thanks be to God. Amen.