

Sermon for the Third Sunday of Easter
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico
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Acts 9:1-20
Psalm 30
Revelation 5:11-14
John 21:1-19

The story from Acts is often referred to as the Conversion of Saul.
To me that's really a misnomer.

To my way of thinking Saul is not converted, and his name was not changed to Paul. Saul's name was Saul Paulus, Saul being his Jewish name and Paulus or Paul being his Roman name.

I say it was not a conversion because Paul does not convert to anything.
He is a Jew and remains a Jew.

If you read the epistles, Paul never apologizes for the persecution of the Christians, who are called "followers of the Way".

In fact he prides himself on his zealousness, and it that same zeal that takes "the Way" from Damascus all the way to Rome, and beyond.

What happens on the road to Damascus is a revelation for Saul, a repentance.
The encounter with the risen Lord changes his mind, which is what repentance means.

In Greek the word is METANOIA, literally "after mind", a shift, an alteration, a change, a turning around.

The risen Jesus redirects the life of the persecutor into the life of the preacher.

Oh that our world were so certain.

But no, we live in a world that is not so clear, where the events are not so certain.

A world in which the redeeming work of our Lord and Savior rarely appears in headlines or on the front page, let alone the religion page, where such a creature still exists.

What we hear are the debates with all sides of issues screaming at each other, and caught in the middle are the victims who strive to understand why these things have happened to them.

It's as if there is a chasm, a great openness that envelops us in pain because we feel the darkness surround us.

That darkness represents a "hole" – what St. Augustine defined as sin in this world. In my very simplified understanding

Augustine looked at the world as cloth woven on a celestial loom. God's goodness entwines in the warp – the vertical fibers - and the weft – the horizontal fibers - of the cloth.

Every so often something happens and there results a gap in the weave. In this hole, this fault in the weave, in this absence of God, evil comes to exist in this world.

Evil is an issue for all of us.
How do we respond? How do we perceive?
How do we tell the story of the war between Good and Evil?

Stories carry the message in metaphor of the Christ narrative.

Theologians argue about most everything.

One particular point of view I appreciate is that God has been revealing bits of the divine truth through the ages, through various peoples and cultures, through myths and legends and stories.

Like the prophets who prepared the way of Salvation, the ancient stories provided hints at the Truth until, finally, through the Logos – the word made flesh – that ultimate truth was revealed.

So God prepared us for the truth of the Word by giving us tastes of the truth until the whole of the truth was revealed at Easter.

Those myths, those legends were of the past,
but I'd suggest those avenues of creative expression are still active in modern allegories that provide us with insights into the workings of the Holy Spirit in the world in which we live and move and have our begin today.

These stories are not overtly Christian that tie directly to the Jesus story. They are stories that allude to the metaphors inherent in the Scriptural stories. It's always good to remember:
God and Jesus Christ speak in metaphors and parables.

I commend to you the movie *Batman vs. Superman*.
It's the second of the Justice League Trilogy launched by Christopher Nolan, who produced the trilogy that identified Batman as the Dark Knight.

The film has been criticized because it is steeped in Christian theology and symbolism.

Like Saul rampaging against the followers of the Way,
Batman and Superman are at odds.

Bruce Wayne (Batman) has witnessed the destruction wrought in the battle between Superman and the Kryptonians to save the Earth and Humanity in the first film.

While we perceive Superman as the hero,
Bruce Wayne sees the devastation and loss of life and blames Superman, who he perceives as a potential danger to Humanity, an enemy of the people.

Clark Kent (Superman) sees Batman as a vigilante acting as judge, jury and executioner against the Constitutional guarantees of due process, an enemy of the people.

Batman is a creature of the night. He has been fighting crime for so long he has lost all hope in humanity. He sees no good in the world around him. He has descended into jaded cynicism.

Superman is a creature of the day.
He believes in the essential goodness of humanity.

Their nemesis in the form of an insane Lex Luthor takes the role of Satan,
and manipulates the two to fight each other,
and then creates a invulnerable demon to kill them both and destroy the world.

Eventually Batman and Superman join forces, and Superman slays the Beast,
but he must sacrifice his life to do so.
In that sacrifice he restores Batman's faith in humanity.

The Gospel reading also is about restoration.

The story is Jesus' third appearance to his disciples.

Peter and the gang have retreated from Jerusalem to the Sea of Tiberius,
which is also the Sea of Galilee, where they all began.

Peter says "Let's go fishing." And the disciples agree.

This is not going fishing like we understand it, like playing hooky,
or as my biologist friends used to say: "Gone single incident sampling."

No, Peter and many of the Disciples were fishermen.
What they are doing here is making money.
What Peter is saying is: Let's go back to what we were doing before.
The implication is that Peter and the Gang are going back to what they know best:
fishing.

They know the number of fish they caught (153)
because they were professional fishermen and they counted the fish
to know how much money they'd make when the fish were taken to market.

The lesson turns on Jesus' interruption of their impulse to go back
to the life they knew,
to force them to live the life that is new.

Jesus asks Peter: "Do you love me?" And Peter answers, "Yes, Lord."
And Jesus tells him: "Feed my lambs."

Three times he is asked, and three times he answers.
Each time Jesus erases the pain of Peter's earlier denials.
How many times have we denied Christ either by something we have done
or by something we have left undone.
I've lost count of the times I've turned away
from opportunities God has given me to feed his sheep.

Maybe we need to listen.
Imagine what Christ in the voice of another might ask of us:

Wife to husband: "Do you love me?" Husband to wife:
"Sweetheart, you know I do."
Wife to husband: "Go, Mow the neighbors yard. He hurt his back at work."

Big sister to little brother: "Do you love me?"
Little brother to sister: "Yeah, I do, Sis."
Sister to brother:
"Go play with the new kid all the other children are ignoring."

God to Congress: "Do you love me?" Congress to God:
"Yes, we print "In God we trust all the time" and we are "one nation under God."
God to Congress:
"Then work together to fashion legislation
that will make the lives of my people better."

We are called by our Baptismal Covenant not to throw up our hands and walk
away,
but to explore ways of making the world a better place.

We have teachers here, and parents and friends
all of whom work to make sure in every way we can
to keep the lives of future children from being snuffed out by someone
who today just needs to have his or her life touched by someone who cares.

And that goes for the world as well. Devastation is raining down in the Ukraine.
Russia seems to be at war with much of the world.
Terrorists continue to bring threats.
At home, mass shootings seem to be a fixture on the news.

What to do? What to do!

Easy answers are not answers.

The world's problems are complex,
and require complex answers by people who are far more intelligent than I am.

So, what can we do?

Look to those who seek the answers.

Ask questions of those who offer easy solutions.

Challenge those who preach hate and division.

Seek those who would minister to the world
rather than those who would isolate and alienate and cast out others.

And pray that we can find ways to make all violence end
that we may be given the opportunity to heal our wounds and heal the world.

If nothing else, keep hope alive.

If nothing else, we must do all we can to protect our children today
so that they may be the ones who will find answers tomorrow.

And most of all, we must do as Peter did: answer the call from Jesus:

“Follow Me.”

Let us pray.

God of new fire, and feasting at daybreak: Come to us in the dullness of routine
and the pain of betrayal; call to us in the way of the cross and the joy of
resurrection; through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. Amen.