

Scripture

Acts 9:1-6

Linda Leavis

Acts 9 is a delightfully understated narrative. It comes right after an incident that shows how incessantly active God's Spirit is (and so how unstoppable God's project is). And the story proper of Saul's conversion is told in a very straightforward manner that is largely devoid of narrative bells and whistles. Maybe that is a piece of irony, too. Maybe that is the Spirit's way of telling us (through Luke) that important though Saul/Paul will be, the story is finally *God's* story and it is finally God's power that gets things done. Even Saul is just a piece in the larger program of God and so we don't need to glitz up his conversion story. It's enough to see that this is a God thing, a movement of the Spirit of God.

¹ Meanwhile 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."

John 21:1-14 (-19)

Rosemary Dawson

In many ways this story from John reiterates the story of the call of Jesus' disciples in Luke 5.1-11. Both stories have the men on unsuccessful fishing trips, being told by Jesus to put out their nets one more time; in both instances, an abundance of fish is hauled up. And both stories end (if you read through to verse 19) with Jesus saying, "Follow me." At the very least, this Resurrection Beach encounter is an echo of that earlier event. Here Jesus appears again, as he has done so many times, to support and guide the disciples in their walk of faith.

¹ After these things 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.

Sermon

Yet Again...and Again

Happy Easter, again! It has been a few weeks since we celebrated the Resurrection. How has your life been? For some of us, maybe not so good, for some maybe it's been great, and for most of us I imagine it been so-so. For all of us, I also imagine that we are simply trying to keep one foot in front of the other. And somehow, just in our daily living, we have lost sight of the resurrection. But not in the sense that Jesus is now glorified, and not in the sense that ‘our eternal home is in heaven’. I mean, rather, we miss the gift of resurrection that lies hidden in our lives here and now.

I think, at least in part, that is what today's Scripture is trying to point us toward. The gospel begins by saying ‘After all these things (in other words ‘later, maybe much later’) Jesus showed himself again to his disciples.’ Then the story goes on to speak about an ordinary day, filled with ordinary work.

The disciples are no longer hanging out in Jerusalem. They've gone home to Galilee, and to fishing – their same old village, same lake, same boats and nets... the same old work. And that's when and where Jesus shows himself again. That may be where Jesus shows himself still – in our ordinary work-a-day lives.

I wonder how the disciples felt fishing that night on the lake. Did they still feel a sadness and loss? Did they now feel adrift without Jesus' physical presence and guidance? Even experiencing Jesus' presence in the upper room may not have helped them take hold of any sense of ‘what's next.’ I wonder if Peter's idea to ‘go fishing’ was just that human characteristic of ‘doing what you know needs to be done’ – even if you come up with empty nets. After all, that is when Jesus showed up. Not when the disciples got in the boat, but in the morning, after a long, hard, fruitless night of work. We've all been there, right? Going on and doing what we know needs to be done; tired, a bit at sea about what's next, but intent to keep on keeping on. Maybe we wish for ‘post-it’ notes and some bread crumb trails, but it seems we are left at the moment to find our own way.

And yet, not ‘too far off’ there is Jesus, waiting on the shore, at the break of day. Jesus even goes so far as to point out to his fishermen-disciples the circumstances they are in –commenting to them ‘you haven’t caught anything, have you?’ I wonder how the disciples felt after that empty labor. Tired for sure, maybe frustrated, maybe disheartened. In fact, at this point, they can’t even recognize Jesus’ presence with them. But that’s ok. Jesus doesn’t leave them there, and he doesn’t chide them. He offers them help they may not have recognized they needed – telling them to ‘move your nets to the other side of the boat.’ And I wonder if Jesus had a wry smile when he said ‘there you will find some fish.’ Yeah, they did, a boat load. Enough fish that they couldn’t lift the nets and had to tow them ashore. Enough of a catch to catch their attention. ‘Oh, its’ Jesus, the Lord is here.’ Has that ever happened to you? You are slogging away, wrapped up in a struggle or in the moment, and suddenly something shifts, and a sense of peace or grace or joy meets you, and wow – everything is now different. Oh, Oh, God is here, with me, now. Is that how you would respond?

Well, Peter, always the impetuous Peter, throws on a shirt and then jumps in and swims to shore. I imagine he sure is happy to see Jesus. It seems he is not thinking about his betrayal in the high priest’s courtyard, when the cock crowed three times. Because if he had that on his mind, I imagine he’d either be really slow rowing that boat to shore or he’d jump in and swim the other way – into the deep. But he knows it was Jesus and he was eager to meet him again. Are we always so eager to ‘come to Jesus’, or might we, at times, hesitate or maybe even swim away?

Whether the fishermen were eager or not, I imagine Jesus was very happy to see Peter and all the disciples. He even had prepared a gracious welcoming place for them – a fire to warm them, food to feed them, and time to simply be with him. “Come and have breakfast’ he called to them. I can’t imagine a better experience than breakfast on a beach, and with Jesus none-the-less! Jesus even invites them to also bring their gifts, their fish, to his table, to share together as one. That invitation, by the way, still stands, there is a table spread before us with the promise of Christ living presence with us, today, here and now. It is a sign, a simple ordinary sign that today and everyday, is filled with resurrection life. Enjoy the feast. Amen.

***Hymn** O Love That Will Not Let Me Go NCH 485

Joys and Concerns

Prayers of the People

Faithful, Loving God, we thank you for your goodness and grace towards us each day. We thank you for the everlasting work of Christ and the eternal presence of his Spirit with us. We are eager to know your favor this day, and to allow that blessing to be the source of all we do, and so we come now seeking to live more fully as disciples of Christ. We pray for your church and for this congregation. May this be a place where your presence, power and guidance are known, and your abundance, love and grace are shared – within our fellowship and throughout our community and our world. We pray for all our leaders. May they experience your grace and be supported by your Spirit as they seek your ways of justice and peace among the nations. We

pray also for all who are suffering today. May the ill find your healing touch, the mourning your comforting presence and the needy your gracious aid. We especially lift up... and we thank you for... We praise you, Glorious God, for all your goodness to us, through Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Choral Response

Remember Me

Offering

God's goodness surrounds us in ways too vast to count. God meets us in our needs and restores us to life. This is the good news we are privileged to share with others, through our words and in our deeds. Let us offer our gifts in faith and joy.

Special Music "To God Be the Glory"

William H. Doane, Arr. Robert D. Vandall

For your constant goodness and faithful love, we give you thanks, gracious God. We bring these offerings as a token of our love and gratitude, and to extend your care to all who long for your living presence. Direct us in your good purpose, that we may make a difference in your world. Amen.

Doxology (choose the one that is best for your faith)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures here below,
praise him above ye heavenly hosts, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise God all creatures here below
Praise God for all that Love has done; Creator, Christ and Spirit One. Amen

Communion

*Hymn Here O My Lord NCH 336

Invitation

Great Thanksgiving

Consecration and Service

Prayer of Gratitude

Lord Jesus, we have received your word and tasted your grace. Now may your Spirit strengthen and guide us as we seek to live as your disciples and servants in the world. Amen.

* **Hymn**

God, Speak to Me

NCH 531

***Common Commission**

Let us go forth into the world in peace, being of good courage, holding fast to that which is good, rendering to no one evil for evil, strengthening the faint-hearted, supporting the weak, helping the afflicted, honoring all persons, loving and serving the Lord, and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

* **Benediction**

Go now into the world

And may our Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father, who loves us, and by his grace has given us eternal comfort and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 adj)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Postlude

music provided by Chris Harris and Lynne Walker