

News flash! My sermon today is about resurrection. That's probably not a surprise. This is the Easter season, and, after all, and God is in the business of resurrection. As I said on Easter Sunday, it's not just Jesus that is raised from the dead. We are too. Has that given you any food for thought about your own life and the resurrection? I hope it has. Today we have (at least) three guys who experienced resurrection in very different ways and so today we have a classic three point sermon:

And these three points are biggies:

Point #1. God will do a new thing in us, through us, or in spite of us at any time. Paul is a perfect example of the "in spite of us" sort. Resurrection experiences are sometimes dramatic and sometimes subtle, something we can only see looking back, at an event. Then there are those who are sure that God is active in their lives, but they think they already know what God has in mind for them. Paul would have said that he already knew what God wanted him to do.

Point # 2. We have to do something too. We have to cooperate with God. We must respond to God with the willingness to say, "Here I am." Ananias is our example of this. Despite his very legitimate fears of going to visit Paul, nevertheless, did what God asked him to do.

Point #3. God will not let us rest on our laurels whatever form that takes. He wants us to go out and tell our experience to others so that others can see and believe that resurrection happens and keeps on happening. We must "Carry the message". That is what the risen Christ was instructing Peter to do at the shore of Galilee.

OK, so let's think together about each of these points:

1) Being aware that God will be resurrecting us at unexpected times. We need no other example of this than Paul. There he was; highly educated, extremely faithful to the Jewish tradition and law, absolutely sure that what God wanted him to do was persecute those heretics who were saying that Jesus was the son of God. He was present for the stoning of Stephen our first martyr. And in our story today he was on his way to Damascus to, as Luke puts it, murder the disciples of the Lord.

Now when Jesus came to him in a flash of light from heaven which blinded him, he was not suffering, he was not feeling as though he was dead in any sense of the word and in need of resurrection. He was at the top of his game. Jesus appeared to him at an unexpected time and place. He tells of this event in his own words in his letter to the people of Galatia: *"You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being."* (Gal 1:13, 15-16) It's not very exciting as Paul tells it. Luke's version is much more of an interesting tale. Maybe Paul downplayed it a bit for the Galatians. Maybe Luke dramatized it a bit for the people for whom his book was written. But whatever the case, the reality is that God did something totally surprising to Paul. If you think back on your life, was there a time when God surprised you? It may be a positive uplifting surprise, or it may have been what seemed at the time a crushing blow; like the blindness that Paul experienced.

Ananias was surprised too to receive a summons from God. He was told that Paul would be waiting for him to come and lay his hands on him and receive his sight.

This is where point # 2 comes in.

2) We have to do something too. We have to respond with willingness. From Abraham, to Jacob, to Samuel, to Isaiah, to Jeremiah, and to Mary the mother of our Lord, the classic

response when God calls you is to say, “Here I am, Lord. And that’s what Ananias did. Now, we have free will, of course. We are always free to turn our backs and walk the other way. And when the Good News doesn’t sound so good, like being called to a street called Straight to see a man who has been helping to murder Christians, it takes all we’ve got to follow God’s call. But for Ananias, the reward was worth the risk. The man he feared had had a change of heart, was filled with the Holy Spirit, was baptized and began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues saying “He is the Son of God.” Now that is a resurrection! For both men.

But then what? What happens after the initial moments of elation of new-found life? For the third point this morning we turn to Peter and the Gospel of John.

3. God will not let us be content with having found new life, in whatever form that takes. He wants us to not continue with life as usual, but to go out and do something about it – do something with the gift we’ve been given. I had a good friend say to me one day, “Heidi, if your life has been changed as you say it has, then act like you’re life has been changed. Good point! If I am a different person now, I ought to show that in my life.

Our Gospel story finds Peter and the disciples back in Galilee. John’s Gospel calls it the Sea of Tiberius but it is one and the same with the Sea of Galilee. The disciples have seen Jesus twice in Jerusalem since the resurrection. They know that Christ is alive, but they have all headed back up to Galilee to resume a life of fishing. Well, they were fishermen to begin with, and one has to make a living somehow. It was life as usual like it had been back before Jesus found them. Maybe worse since they weren’t even having good luck with their chosen trade.

Jesus calls to them from the shore. They don’t recognize him, but they do what he suggests, and when they throw their nets now, they are full to bursting. This is Jesus telling them once again that resurrection life is abundant life. John, the beloved disciple is the first to recognize Jesus because, well, this is John’s Gospel. In this Gospel John is the smartest, the fastest, the most loyal, and now it appears the most observant too. And sometimes John seems to put

Peter in a not so favorable light. Because he calls our attention to the fact that Peter was fishing naked.

Peter throws his clothes on to jump in the water, and swim to the shore. It seems a little odd to put on your clothing to swim, but I bet it had something to do with wanting to be dressed when he got to shore. And the fishing naked thing, well, I just wonder if it was a way to preserve one's clothes and not get fish guts all over them. After all, in those days you didn't just throw your fishy clothes into the washer with some Tide. It must have been a pain in the neck to get the fish smell and stains out of your clothing, I bet.

So, they get to shore, they eat a fish breakfast, and then Jesus pulls Peter aside and tells him what he needs him to do. We wonder why the three times, "Do you love me?" This is Jesus being emphatic. This is Jesus saying, "You don't seem to have heard me all those times when I told you to go out and heal and forgive and spread the good news of abundant life. What are you doing here? Tend my sheep!"

You see, Jesus didn't just want the disciples to follow him now. He didn't need people to follow Jesus, he needed his friends to BE Jesus. Elsewhere in John Jesus has said, "You are in me and I in you." "Just as the father has sent me, so I send you." Well, Peter you can't be Jesus just sitting naked in a boat at night catching nothing.

Resurrection doesn't always look like what we expect. From Paul to Ananias, to Peter and to us. Resurrection is commonplace, but you have to pay attention to see it.

Michael J. Fox was interviewed last week because he has a new book out. I was only half listening to the newscast until I heard Michael say, "Parkinson's has really been a gift to me."

What! How could he say that! It's a debilitating and ultimately deadly disease for which we have no cure. My father died of it. How can he say that!

He went on to joke, “You know, it’s the gift that keeps on taking.” God sent me a major course change. When I was diagnosed there was a hole created in my life where I used to have all my work and the way I was. But that hole that was created left room for so many good things to come in that I would never have made time for otherwise. It is a gift !

Michael has found resurrection abundance in his life through a fatal disease. Surely you and I can find resurrection too. Look for resurrection. Live resurrection. Be resurrected!