

Sermon, Father William J. Albinger

Sunday April 18, 2010

Easter 3C 2010

(Sermon delivered from notes – this is a recreation):

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well, Easter was two weeks ago. Most of the world has moved on. What's the next big thing? I guess Mother's Day. But here we are still celebrating Easter as we will for the next month. Why? I think Paul gave us the answer in one of his letters: Without Easter, nothing else we do or believe would matter.

In today's Gospel lesson from John we have another Resurrection appearance by Jesus to the Disciples. Notice it is not in Jerusalem but back in Galilee. Earlier Jesus appeared to them in the locked room in Jerusalem. But they still didn't get it. What did they do? Where are they? They went back! Back to their old neighborhood, back to their old jobs as fishermen! They are back doing what they knew and always did. Why? Probably because they are human like us.

But just as Jesus had no use for locked doors, he has no use for backsliding. He calls to them again, he seeks them out. Notice his words. He says, "Children, you have no fish, have you." Then he teaches them how to fish, the abundance is enormous. They remember and recognize the Lord. Then Jesus is there cooking for them – preparing breakfast. Not as spectacular as washing their feet, but they recognize his servant leadership and table fellowship.

Jesus then confronts Peter. Three times he asks Peter if he loves him and three times he receives Peter's declaration of love. We are not talking affectionate emotion here. Love in this sense is loyalty, dedication and commitment. The original Greek shows Peter is not as committed as Jesus asks, but Jesus takes him where he is, just as Jesus finds us wherever we are at in

our lives.

Then Jesus rehires Peter: “Follow me.” It is a call to discipleship. Jesus is still leading. The disciples had gone back, but Jesus would have none of it. They are called to move on, to respond to God’s initiative. Follow me, let’s move on!

The Disciples must have been busy because when we encounter Paul, then Saul, in the Book of Acts, it is maybe 15-20 years later. There is no a large community of people who follow “the Way of Jesus”. In fact communities have been formed all over beyond Jerusalem – all the way to Damascus! Jerusalem is in turmoil. The response of the Pharisees and temple leaders to this movement is the same as their response to Jesus – Kill it! They were threatened. Here are people just like us but they act and pray differently.

Saul was a Pharisee, learned in the law. He was devout and righteous by keeping all the laws. He was absolutely certain of his beliefs and it enraged him to see “sinners” calling themselves followers of God. This incited him to violence – sacred violence. We already encountered him presiding over the stoning of Stephen to death. Now he has letters empowering him to go to Damascus and hunt down these heretics.

He is literally knocked off his high horse on the road and blinded. He who saw everything so clearly, now is blind. Jesus challenges him. He doesn’t say, “Saul why don’t you believe?” No. Jesus says, “Saul, why do you do violence. What pushes you to hate and persecute?”

Jesus challenges another man at the same time – nice old Ananias. In a vision he tells Ananias to go to a street called straight and to find Saul and heal him. Ananias is no fool. He is sure the Lord has made a mistake. “Lord,” he says, “I know of this man. He is really bad news!” It is an old story of God finding people and sending them on a mission to bring others to God – Abraham, Jonah, the Prophets, Peter and now Ananias is sent to find Saul.

God’s acceptance is brought to Saul even as he murders the followers of Jesus. God’s

love is that big.

So what do these stories mean to us today? I took a few lessons from them. The most important is that God is God and we are not! The main character in all these wonderful Bible stories is God. It is not about us; it is about what God wants. Ananias may not have wanted Saul, but God did and God knew what to do with him. We wouldn't be here today without him.

This is true for us also. Too often we do what we do and feel good about it. But what does GOD want us to be doing? What is God calling us to be? We may not be struck blind, but too often we ignore what God wants us to move onto in the future. Individually and collectively we are asked "Do you love me?" "Will you follow me?" "Will you reach out to a Saul?"

The second lesson I see in these readings is that God hates violence – especially sacred violence. There are lots of ways to look at the Cross and the Resurrection. I often look at the Cross as the epitome of sacred violence and the Resurrection as God's repudiation of violence and a call to us to follow Jesus out of fear and hatred.

There has always been violence and religious violence. There is a lot of it in the world today and even in the Christian church. Are called like Ananias to confront it and heal it with love, calling our enemies "brother"? Perhaps we have a role model in Gamaliel, Saul's rabbi, Saul's teacher. When the Sanhedrin was deciding Jesus' fate, Gamaliel was the only one who preached patience and tolerance and recognized that it is God's will that matters, not ours. He knew that Creation and life are God's story, not ours. Leave this Jesus alone, he advised. If it is from God, so be it. If not, it will fail on its own. It is advice that we could hear more of today in our lives and in our church.

Amen.