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St. James', Mt. Airy
4/10/16

Easter 3C
Acts 9:1-6 (7-20)
Psalm 30
Revelation 5:11-14
John 21:1-19

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.
Amen.**

Night has passed and a new day is beginning.

For this third, and final, time in the Gospel of John that Jesus appeared to the disciples after being raised from the dead, we watch the story unfold at the edge of dawn after a long night.

No longer locked in an upper room in Jerusalem, the disciples have followed Peter and returned to where it all began – their fishing boats. The familiar rocking of the boat on water, the familiar weight of the nets in their hands as they cast them, the familiar smell and taste of the sea air. They passed the night seeking familiarity and normality in the wake of an upheaval even greater than that which had caused them to leave their nets behind in the first place – the death and resurrection of their friend.

When life-changing things happen, it is human to seek that which is familiar and mundane. To let ourselves operate on auto-pilot, to let the known ground us. And it works, to an extent – and for a time.

But the thing about life-changing events – be they joyful or awful, planned or the ones that blindsides us – is that they change us, and they change how we live our lives. Just as the darkness of night gives way to light, change is inescapable.

Or put another way: change is inevitable, but transformation is optional.

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Just after daybreak Jesus stood before the disciples on the beach, but they did not recognize him. It was only after a miraculous catch, after a night of empty nets, that the beloved disciple, John, recognized him: *It is the Lord!* And it was only then that they returned to the shore, Peter leading the way as he jumped into the sea and swam to greet his teacher.

Many in the early church found, in this story of the beloved disciple and Peter, two distinct but necessary aspects of faith. John Chrysostom wrote,

“When they recognized him, the disciples Peter and John again exhibited their different temperaments. The one was fervent, the other more contemplative. The one was ready to go, the other more penetrating. John is the one who first recognized Jesus, but Peter is the first to come to him.”¹

Neither recognition, nor action alone, constitutes authentic faith, and thus one needs to unite the best of Peter, and the best of the beloved disciple, if one is to be a person of true faith.²

I believe it is when we do this – unite recognition and action – that transformation is possible.

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So much can be lost in translation, and such is the case with today’s Gospel reading.

¹ *Feasting on the Word Year C*, Volume 2, pg. 421-422.

² *Feasting on the Word Year C*, Volume 2, pg. 422.

After feeding the disciples on the beach, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him.

The image is meant to evoke the three times Peter so boldly denied he knew Jesus, a symbolic redemption of him. Peter replied yes each time, and was given again the charge to care for the flock.

But this scene becomes so much more when you read it in the original Greek. You see, in Greek there were three widely used words for love: agape, philia, and eros.

Eros is romantic love; it is intimacy and passion.

Philia is a friend-like love; it encompasses loyalty and affinity.

And agape is an all-encompassing, stunningly unconditional love; it is self-giving compassion.

When our Gospel reading shows Jesus asking Peter if he loves him, what we miss in the English translation is the type of love he means.

Jesus asked Peter if he had agape love for him, and Peter answered that Jesus knows he has philia for him. So Jesus asked Peter again, agape? Peter says, sure, philia.

So the third time Jesus changed his question: Peter do you love me as your friend? *Lord, you know everything; you know that love you.* And yes, Jesus does know.

He knows that Peter can't yet bring himself to say he has agape love because of the shame he carries for denying Jesus. He knows that the unconditional love that he offered in life, and in death, and is offering again, is still too big for Peter to fully recognize. He knows he must meet Peter where he is, and then direct the love that **is** offered.

And so he says to Peter: *Follow me.*

Peter has always been a doer, after all. Jesus knows the recognition will come.

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Follow me.

Jesus continued to look ahead, and led the disciples into doing so as well.

In this final story of Jesus appearing to his friends, he called them once more into mission. He fed them, and then equipped them with one more glimpse of recognition, and invited them again into action.

So much had changed in their lives that fateful week, but he was offering them transformation.

Follow me and feed my sheep – and the world will never be the same.

This transformation is offered to us as well. Not in the form of a miraculous catch or breakfast on the beach, but in the same hope that we will recognize God in the world around us, and take action to share God's agape love (and perhaps philia love if that's what we've got).

Over 2000 years later, and still this world is need of such love. So much has changed. Transformation is still unfolding. It does so because followers of Christ, like you and me, continue to respond to God's love and answer the call to follow forward.

The sun has risen, a new day dawns. Let us live resurrection lives – lives that show forth God's love for the whole world, this day and always.

~ AMEN ~