

As we would expect on this third Sunday in Easter, the readings today have a common theme about newness. Each one invites our hearts and minds into Christ's saving grace. And our psalm today sings out in thanksgiving.

In Acts, we hear the story of the conversion and call of Saul of Tarsus who zealously sought out people of the Way so that he could ensure they were transported to Jerusalem where they would be persecuted for their faith belief.

Everything changes for Saul when he is literally "stopped in his tracks" by the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. While he is walking Jesus comes to him and tells him that by persecuting his disciples, he is actually persecuting Jesus. What eventuates is the conversion of Saul and the birth of the new Paul who becomes an apostle and a great witness to the way of Jesus Christ.

The reading from revelation about the slaughtered lamb, is believed to be a reference to the crucified messiah, and how God's purposes contained in the scroll, are accomplished by Jesus sacrificial death. The number seven, associated with the seven horns and eyes, proclaims fullness of power. The objects of the Harp and golden bowls, were used in worship and the prayers of the saints on earth are joined with the worship rendered to the lamb by the heavenly creatures.

A new song is sung because Christ by his sacrifice has inaugurated a new era. New hymns of praise mark and celebrate special occasions. Universal praise to God and to the lamb ensue, proclaiming equality in authority and majesty.

The psalm is a thanksgiving psalm. It sings about recovery from grave illness. The psalter replaces mourning with dancing, and the soiled, torn garments of penitence with a new festal robe.

The new day has dawned - a new era for Saul – a new era of worship in which the heavenly host and the prayers of the saints on earth are joined together as one continuous act of worship, praise and thanksgiving. And a new song is sung, because in Christ a new era is inaugurated.

Today's gospel passage is from the epilogue of John's gospel, and continues the theme of newness.

Most scholars believe that this section was added to the original narrative at a later date and by a different author. One commentary suggests the reason for this addition, is so that the narrative includes how the risen Jesus passes on the Shepherd ministry to Peter in Jesus authority.

Regardless, however, of its reason or authorship, theologians agree that the story of the risen Jesus on the beach in this morning's gospel passage, is central to our reflection of the risen Jesus because it contains the complexities of obedience, and the way and power of agape, which is self giving love in our everyday lives.

There are different parts to the story, the miraculous draft of fish, Jesus asking Peter if he loves him, and how that love will eventuate for Peter. The miracle of the fish catch is both a reference to the past and the future. In the past Peter had been a fisherman, but soon he would be a new kind of fisherman. As a follower of Jesus, he will find that out of one life

experience comes another. Nothing stays the same – it rather moves in a forward journey in life. One theologian suggests that the miraculous catch, because it is done in obedience to Jesus takes in Peter's past life, as well as the beginning of a new life. When we live in Christ, what we have been, what we are now, and what we will be, integrate together -unified as one personality of who we are in him. Then there is the question of Peter's love. The question is couched in terms of the present. 'Do you love me?' Jesus asks him. The question however hints at the past and Peter's denial. It also looks into the future and his ministry as a shepherd. Peter has a past, as do we – Peter's past is written about in the scriptures, it is about when he failed at the moment of the Cross. 'I do not know him' he said. Yet we also know that Peter is not beyond redemption for the grace of God is large enough for redemption no matter what the past.

This was good news for Peter – it is good news for us. The grace of God is great enough for all of us. Do you love me, is always a question for all of us in the present moment. In many ways our answer will determine our future as followers of Jesus. Then we hear Jesus warn Peter of the cost of this love. Theologian Alexander Shaia reminds us that after his experiences with the resurrected Jesus, Peter stayed awhile in Jerusalem and then moved on to Rome, only to encounter the slaughter of many flowers of the Way. He hastily left the city, but received a vision of the Christ as he fled, which caused him to return to Rome and eventually be martyred there.¹ Peter was indeed taken by his faith 'where he did not wish to go' yet despite his clear fears and misgivings, he made the choice through his love for Christ, to hear and obey the final words spoken to him by Jesus: Follow me. Jesus final words in John's gospel are addressed to every reader of the gospel. In today's world thankfully, many of us are not facing the same crisis that the community of the disciples did, however whatever the complexities of our lives, Jesus asks the same of us as he did of Peter.

Do you love me? Follow me!

The question and call of our Christian journey to lifelong discipleship, repeated each day in our lives until the end, prayerfully deepening and maturing our faith and commitment along the way.

Let us pray: Jesus our brother, Lord and saviour,

You followed the necessary path

and were broken on our behalf.

May we neither cling to our pain

where it is futile,

Nor refuse to embrace the cost

When it is required of us;

That in losing our selves for your sake,

We may be brought to new life. Amen. The Lord be with you.

¹ Alexander J. Shaia, *The Hidden Power of the Gospels*. Harper Collins; New York. 2010. p235