

**FOLLOWING CHRIST**  
**JOHN 21: 1-19; ACTS 9: 1-6**  
**THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**APRIL 18, 2010**

**Acts 9: 1-6**

*9 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: 1-19**

*21 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. 15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." 19(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."*

Let us pray. Holy God, we give you thanks for the Good News of Easter. We are amazed by your grace that comes to us in our Risen Lord. Thank you for coming to us where we are. Thank your for your call. Inspire us follow Christ as individuals and as a church. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight for you are our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

"I am going fishing," Peter told the disciples. For us fishing may be recreation, a way to relieve stress. For Peter, it was going back to work, getting back to normal. Some say humans are wired to seek balance

and stability. Routines give us peace. After the emotional overload of all that happened that first Easter, it is not surprising that Peter and the other disciples would seek what was familiar – life as usual.

I see this sometimes with people who experience a spiritual awakening, perhaps when a loved one dies, when they survive a threatening illness or when they attend an inspiring conference or retreat. At first there is excitement and anticipation of a changed and new life. As time goes on, people often return to business as usual. Like Peter we go fishing.

The Good News of this story is that the Risen Lord comes to us where we are. Even if we, like Peter, have denied Christ repeatedly, He will come to us. We may not recognize him at first. None of the disciples did. The Spirit blows where it will. As John Calvin observed, part of God's amazing grace is that God accommodates us by coming in a way we can understand.

Methodist Bishop Will Willimon (Pulpit Resource April 22, 2007, 22) said that our gospel passage may be a parable of our world after Easter. *We are going about our business, assuming that the old, familiar world is intact* but then the risen Christ intrudes. All at once our lives explode into the wonder, the miracle and the extravagance that characterizes life in Christ.

Through the centuries Christians have interpreted the behavior of the Beloved Disciple and Peter to represent two distinct but necessary aspects of the Christian faith (Bessler in Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2, 420). It was the more reflective, observant Beloved Disciple who recognized Jesus, but the impulsive go getting Peter took the first action. As individuals and as a church we need both elements of faith: quiet contemplation and courageous action.

Too often we lift up one to the exclusion of the other. Without reflection we may not recognize Christ's presence, but without action our faith is empty.

Unlike Adam in the Garden of Eden, Peter overcame his shame out of love for the Lord. He covered his nakedness, jumped into the water, and went to Jesus. Some of us may need to get over what has happened in the past. We may need to jump into the water of faith today and move closer to Christ.

On the beach Jesus had breakfast ready. He fed the disciples as a new day dawned. The labor of the disciples contributed to the feast, but God is the ultimate provider.

"If you love me, feed my sheep," Jesus told Peter. All our action has a purpose: to love others as Christ loves us. "Follow me," Jesus said. Are we following Jesus and feeding his sheep in this third week of Easter, or have we resumed life as usual according to society's standards?

The message of the Risen Lord is more than spring, butterflies and flowers. It is more than new clothes, swimming and plans for summer. Easter is not simply an ancient story, nor is it only a promise about what happens to us when we die. Easter is more than coming to worship, listening to pretty music and reciting nice words.

Following Jesus may take us to places we would rather not go. We may need to stand up to a bully at school or say no to someone at work. We may face health challenges or a financial downturn. Relationships may be strained. We may dread the tests coming up. Change may be difficult. Wherever we go in life, Christ will be present. We may need a beloved disciple to help us recognize him. Christ will sustain us, but first we must see God moving in our midst. We must come closer. If we do, we will hear Christ's call to feed his sheep and follow him into our future.

Jesus showed Peter what could happen. Jesus will show us how to bear fruit and catch fish through what we do, but our success will not be solely for our own benefit. “If you love me,” Jesus told Peter, “feed my sheep.”

Thelma Brake said yes to Christ’s call for her life. She followed him. She studied God Word, she worshiped and prayed. She tithed to both the Newark church and this one. Thelma took action. She watched for enemy airplanes among many other things which you can learn about from her daughter Katie during fellowship. When people gathered to celebrate Thelma’s life, they talked about her generosity and her incredible gift of hospitality. I wish I had tasted one of those chocolate pies. She even put a slice in Katie’s post office box one day. Thelma welcomed neighbors and strangers. There was always room for another person at her dinner table, even when times were tough. Thelma served Christ by serving those in need, over and over again. The retired pastor who spoke at her funeral said Thelma lived out the gospel of Matthew 25. She gave water to the thirsty and food to the hungry. She served the least and the lost in Christ’s name. According to her family, life was a marvelous adventure for Thelma.

What about us? Will it be business as usual this third week after Easter or will we decide to follow Jesus? Many of us have been baptized into new life, but we are not really living it. We plod through each day with our own agendas and concerns or the ones people try to give us. We zone out on media, food, Facebook, the internet or busyness of any kind. We follow to-do lists and schedules, not Christ. One recent study confirmed that humans cannot really do more than two things at once, but we keep trying. Are we multi-tasking ourselves to death, or are we following Christ?

Last week some of our women prepared large coverings to serve as room dividers for the Live Oak new church development in Cedar Park. Their pastor Caz Minter preached for us, and San Gabriel has provided monetary support. On their website they say they want to help families move from the search for success to a search for significance, which they believe comes from life in relationship with Christ.

Faith communities follow Christ together. Presbyterians believe that God calls us into a particular congregation so that together we become the body of Christ in our own time and place. We are blessed by our differences in gifts, perspectives and theologies. We encourage each other and hold each other accountable. We enjoy fellowship and the study of God’s word. At San Gabriel generations work together to share God’s love and the Word with each other, our community and the world. We believe God has given us this mission in Jesus Christ. We trust that we are led by the Spirit.

The pictures of the gathering at Live Oak last Sunday took me back to the early days of this congregation. We hauled church in the trunks of our cars or in trailers for years. Frankly, we did not dream that we would ever have a building like this.

We follow Christ one day and one Sunday at a time, and Christ shows us how to catch a boatload of fish – over and over again. People wanted bells for years, but we did not have any place to store them. We also did not have Patricia or most of today’s ringers. We started with Beth McCullough playing the keyboard. Jim, Kent, Kitty and I led the singing – and aren’t we all thankful for the musicians who glorify God in this sanctuary today?

Miracles happen when we follow Christ. Healing and reconciliation happen. People come home to Christ or find Christ for the first time. People are fed in this congregation and around the world. Your offerings amaze me. How blessed we are to be a part of God’s provision.

The community in Georgetown will be restored by Christ this summer when we help people who cannot help themselves. Orphans in Romania will be loved because we support a missionary there. Homeless

children in Georgetown and in Porta Prince will find hope through our donations. Seniors will receive rides, meals and a visit because we decided to feed Christ's sheep.

The miracle of Easter is now. It happens when we follow Christ as individuals and as a church.

Our master plan for this church shows three buildings on the east of this one. The first two are designed to be classrooms, offices for the staff we do not yet have and yes, storage for our stuff. From the beginning those called to San Gabriel hoped we would establish a pre-school and develop inspiring worship and strong programs to nurture people of all ages. In our recent visioning effort, we came up with a boatload of dreams. Christ will provide what we need if we follow him and feed his sheep.

If you do not see a boatload of fish this morning in worship, stick around for fellowship, Discipleship Hour and the Blessing of the Animals this afternoon. Watch out, because you may recognize Christ in our midst. If you meet Christ today, he will ask you to follow him. I hope we say yes and jump into the deep water of faith. There is no age limit for following Christ. We are never too young or too old.

"Feed my sheep," Jesus told Peter and Jesus tells us. "Follow me." May God bless you with the miracle of Easter.