

14 April 2013
Easter 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Before and After: Making Old Sinners New”
Text: John 21:1-19 (Acts 9:1-22; Revelation 5:8-14)

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

It is said that repetition is the mother of learning. And so Jesus does not appear to His disciples just *one* time after His resurrection, but *many* times. For the one thing Jesus wants His disciples - and of all times and places - to know, the most important thing, the one thing (as Paul said) that Christianity cannot do without, is the resurrection. That yes, Jesus was dead; *really* dead and buried in a real tomb, but is now risen from the dead. And so sin, its author (the devil), and its wages (death), have all been conquered by Jesus. Because of this, the way things were is not the way things now are. Jesus is making all things new. New, not by destroying sin and everything sin has infected in a great holocaust and starting over. In our “when-it’s-broke-toss-it-away-and-buy-a-new-one” world, that’s the way we think. But your loving God did not want to throw you away. So Jesus is making all things new one person at a time. Conquering sin, its author, and its wages through His own holocaust on the cross and His powerful resurrection, and then conquering sin, its author, and its wages *in you* by giving you His victory in the forgiveness of your sins. That you live a new life.

And the account we heard today highlights this truth because it is a story we’ve heard before (Luke 5). And so we get kind of a “before and after” snapshot of the way things *were* and the way things *are* with the newness of life Jesus brings. For some three years before this, at the very beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, Peter, James, and John were cleaning their nets after fishing all night and, *just like we heard today*, had caught nothing. So Jesus tells them, *like today*, to try again, and when they do they catch so many fish that their nets begin to break and both their boats begin to sink. And when Peter realizes what has just happened, the miracle and the power of God he has just witnessed, he falls on his knees and says, “*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord*” (Luke 5:8). That’s the “before” picture.

But in today's reading, it's different. Peter is a changed, a transformed, man. For after *this* miraculous catch of fish, after John says to Peter "*It is the Lord!*" *this* time, Peter is not afraid. This time, in fact, he can't wait to get to Jesus! He puts on his outer garment and before the other disciples know it, Peter's jumping out of the boat and into the water to swim and get to Jesus as fast as he can. *Before Easter*, Peter knew only the weight of his sin. *Before Easter*, Peter is afraid to be in the presence of God. *Before Easter*, Peter tells Jesus to leave. But now, after Easter and the peace that Jesus gave (as we heard last week), Peter knows the forgiveness of Jesus. And he is no longer afraid.

So first notice this: Jesus has not changed, and Easter does not mean that He is now done all His work and now it's up to us. No, He is still working. What He did *before* Easter He now does *after* Easter. And Jesus is not just now all "spiritual" - He is still working through the physical, through their calling, or vocation, as fishermen. That didn't change and won't change. What changed is the disciples. What changed is us. Jesus' death and resurrection was not to make *Jesus* new, but to make us new. To raise us from sin, fear, and death to a new life in Him. Not a new super-spiritualized life, but a new life in *your* callings, or vocations. Not to take us out of this world, but to make us new in this world. And we see that in Peter. He is a changed man. *And so are you.*

And yet . . . it seems there's something on Peter's mind. For right after this, Jesus (who knows what we all need and provides what we need) asks him three times: ***Simon, son of John, do you love me?*** Three times, which (almost all agree) mirror Peter's three denials of Jesus just a few days before. Jesus gives Peter the opportunity to not deny, but to confess Him. That's the *what* of what's happening here; the question is: *why?*

Was Peter earning Jesus' forgiveness? Absolutely not! Jesus died for Peter's denials on the cross. All the sin of all the people of all the world (including Peter's and yours and mine) were on Jesus on the cross. That's done and over with. Jesus doesn't even bring it up. But if Peter's like me, and if you're anything like me, even after you know you're forgiven, you still have regrets. You still have those nagging voices in your head. Our Lord may *forgive our iniquities and remember our sins no more* (Jer 31:34), as we heard during Holy Week - but it's not so easy for us. We remember. I *often* forget the good I do, but I often cannot seem to forget the sins and mistakes and the wish-I-could-do-that-one-overs. Those sins that haunt, and that satan uses to taunt us.

And so it's not that Jesus was holding his sin against Peter - *Peter* was holding his sin against Peter! Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is yourself. And so Jesus lovingly gives Peter three more chances to confess Him. Again, not because Jesus needed it, but because Peter did.

Now maybe you're thinking: it's not the same. It's easy to confess Jesus in front of Jesus, where it's safe. But again, this is for Peter. This is what Peter needed now. And did it make a difference? Do we see a new Peter? Well yes, and not just here, but later. For the Peter who was so afraid of death *before* that he denied knowing Jesus three times, would later go to death on a cross confessing Jesus. Jesus tells him it will be so. Peter the denier would be Peter the martyr. Not to Peter's credit, but because of the death and resurrection of Jesus working in him. The same death and resurrection of Jesus that is working in you. Maybe you don't know what you're going to face in the future, but Jesus knows. And He is preparing you for it. Making you new for it. Just like Peter.

The second thing to take note of in this account today is what Jesus calls His disciples as they are out fishing. He says to them, "**Children, do you have any fish?**" Children. They're children here - not disciples, not apostles. For those two titles focus more on what *they* do - those who follow, those who are sent. But *children* focuses on what God has done. Because no one does anything to make yourself a child. Being a child happens to you. You are born or adopted into a family. And so while disciple and apostle is the calling given to them and what they then did, children is who they are.

Which is important here because, once again, what the disciples did is fail! They were out all night and (again!) caught nothing. They denied, betrayed, doubted, ran away, and hid when the going got tough. And how often we fail in our vocations, in our lives, in the tasks assigned to us. But that does not change their status as children of God. For children don't have to earn their way into the family or earn their keep in it - they are loved because they are children. So it is with the disciples, so it is with Paul - who Jesus made His child even though Paul was working against Jesus! - and so it is with us. We're children of God because we've been made so in Holy Baptism. In those waters Jesus came to us and said: *you are mine*. And so we are. And that day was Easter day for us! The day (as Paul would later write in his letter to the Romans) when we died with Christ and were resurrected with Christ to a new life (Romans 6).

And so these fishermen who don't seem to be able to catch any fish, Jesus will use to be His fishers of men (Luke 5:10). And they would be not because of *their* skill and ability, but just as out on the lake, *Jesus* would be working, now through His Spirit providing the catch and working through them. And you too. If you ever think you're too much of a failure for Jesus to use you - as a parent, a child, a Christian, or whatever your callings and places in life - just remember the disciples and take heart! If Jesus wants *them* as His children and can use and transform them, then He wants you as His child and can use and transform you as well.

And the third thing to take away from this account today is that it is a picture of the kingdom of God coming to us. This is what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer when we say *Thy kingdom come*. With those words we're not just praying for God's kingdom of glory, Heaven, to come and the world to end. No, we're praying for His kingdom of grace to come to us here and now. His kingdom of grace that came, right there, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee that day. His kingdom of grace that came to Paul on the road to Damascus. And His kingdom of grace that comes to us here today. His kingdom of grace that comes as the Lord comes to us, unworthy as we are, with His Word and Spirit and forgiveness and makes us His own.

Many folks pray *Thy kingdom come* and think only of the scene we heard in the Epistle, with the angels and thrones and all of that. But it's more than that. God's kingdom is bigger than that. The readings we heard today show us that He is active and here with us now, bringing His kingdom to us and bringing us into His kingdom. Active in all our various vocations and walks of life. Active as we raise our families, as we work, even as we go fishing. And most importantly, active for us as He comes to us in His Word and Sacraments, giving us faith, forgiving us, transforming us, and making us new.

And so it is a new Peter who jumps out of the boat and swims to the shore and gets to Jesus soaking wet from head to toe! And that's what we'll look like when we get to Jesus, too. Soaking wet from living in the water of our baptism. Soaking wet from jumping into those waters every day, as everyday we confess our sin and receive our Lord's forgiveness and are made new. As everyday we remember that in that water we are children of God, and that the kingdom of God has come to us.

Yet not only do we live "wet" in God's kingdom of grace here on earth, Jesus also calls out to us **come and eat**. For just as He prepared and provided food for His disciples then, so He has prepared and provided food for His disciples now. *For you*. His Body and Blood, that we be sustained in the forgiveness and new life He has given us, eating now in His kingdom of grace, until He one day calls us home to His kingdom of glory and the feast that has no end.

Until then, we join the heavenly chorus in their song to the Lord. A new song, by those made new. The song we heard in Revelation, and that we sing in our liturgy: *Worthy is Chrst, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God. Power, riches, wisdom, and strength, and honor, blessing, and glory are His. This is the feast of victory for our God! For the Lamb who was slain has begun His reign.* For He who lived and died now lives and reigns and is working for us and for our salvation. Just as by the Sea of Galilee that day. Making new one person at a time. None too old, none too far gone, none does He give up on. He died for all, He rose for all, and He lives for all, that all be forgiven, all be made new.

That's why **Christ is risen!** *[He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]* And is here, for you.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.