

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
5327 W. Washington Blvd.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Third Sunday of Easter
April 18, 2010
John 21:1-19; Acts 9:1-22

“Two Places, One Mission”
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

There could be no greater contrast between the two places mentioned in the Gospel lesson and the first reading for today. Can you picture them in your mind? In the Gospel we have a beautiful early morning view from the lakeshore of the Sea of Galilee. The sun has just risen. The water is calm and serene. The hills of Galilee reflect the light of the early morning sun and there is a fire burning on the shore, a place for breakfast to be prepared. A group of fishermen are pulling in their rather surprising and successful catch of fish and One waits for them on the shore.

In contrast, the other place mentioned in the First Reading is along a hard sun baked road in the midst of a desert like area. An ancient and bustling city lies ahead on the road and the hot sun beats down on the scene as a determined and passionate man on horseback heads for Damascus on the road with his traveling companions. He intends to carry out what he considers a God-ordained mission. But One waits for him as well.

So there are two places today, but there is also one mission because of the One who waits. May the Lord bless our thoughts and meditation upon these His words this day.

I. Peter

The Gospel lesson has seven disciples in it. Five of them are named—Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, and the sons of Zebedee. But in many respects the account is about Peter. It is Peter who decides to go fishing to take up his old line of work on the Sea of Galilee. The others go along and spend the night but catch nothing. But as the new day is breaking and the sun is rising, they see someone standing along the shore. He encourages them to cast their net on the right side of the boat and suddenly, miraculously, it is filled to the breaking with fish. “It is the Lord!”, the disciple whom Jesus loved says. And Peter does not wait. Impetuous, determined Peter throws his outer garment around himself and plunges into the water. Now it is not the most logical act to put your clothes on before jumping into the water, but this is what Peter does. And he hurries toward the shore. When he gets there he waits until the other disciples, struggling with the net arrive and they unload their catch of 153 large fish. And they all hear the invitation, “Come and have breakfast.” For breakfast has been prepared for them. There was bread and fish for truly He who is the provider of every perfect gift was present there with his grace.

And His grace was present as well in the words which follow and conclude the Gospel for today. They are very personal words, very difficult words but words of forgiveness and words

of commission. Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Not once, not twice, but three times! And each time the question is asked, the anguish of Simon Peter becomes greater. "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." "Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you." In the question is restoration. In the answer is repentant faith. For the one who had denied his Lord is restored to an important task, "Feed my lambs. ... Tend my sheep. ... Feed my sheep." The mission is clear. And the one who has ordained the mission, reminds Peter that he will give his own life in his work. The denier, the coward, is called again to serve.

II. Paul

The second place we visit today is much more stark. The one person whom we see on the road to Damascus who is the most important is intent on violence and murder against the Lord's own. It would not be the first time. For a few chapters before in the books of Acts we read that Saul consented in the death of Stephen. He has the proper authorization in his hands. He is going to put an end to this foolishness and to these foolish Christians once and for all. But he who appears to be most important is suddenly overshadowed by the Lord of all. He is knocked to the ground by the light and by the voice. The light is from heaven itself and the voice as well. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And the response of Saul is shocking thought predictable—"Who are you, Lord?" There is no mistaking that voice for anyone else than the Lord Himself. And the words of the voice must have shaken Saul of Tarsus to his very soul—"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." And Saul, blinded by the light is lead into the city where for three days he waits.

The remainder of the account relates the call to Ananias to visit with Saul and to tell him of his mission: "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." And Saul's sight is restored and he is baptized and goes into the synagogues proclaiming Jesus, "He is the Son of God." For the mission is again set before him, and Saul, soon to be known as Paul, like Peter will also suffer much for the sake of Jesus' name.

III. The One Who Calls

These two readings share a very common theme. It is not just in the calls of Peter and Paul but in the one who calls them. And that is a very Easter message. For the one who calls is very much alive and very much in charge. It is the risen Lord who appears to Peter beside the Sea of Galilee. It is the risen Lord who appears to Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians even refers to these facts: "He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." (1 Cor. 15)

And it is the risen Lord who has enabled the one mission by his life, his death, and his glorious resurrection. The mission is to feed the lambs and sheep of the Lord, to proclaim his name before the nations. The mission is to bring the people of God into everlasting fellowship with the Holy Trinity by faith. That is the one mission that all of us are part of by virtue of our membership in the Holy Christian Church. Yes, it was the apostolic mission of Peter and Paul but it was also the mission of those who followed them. It is the mission of the church today and so it is our mission as well. In our support of the spreading of the word of grace and love in Jesus Christ and in our personal witness as well. Have you considered how you show the love of the Lord to those around you, your friends, your neighbors, your family members? Have you thought of the ways in which you do that? We can always work at it. We are never perfect. But it is the Lord who works in us and through us to bring the good news to those who need to hear. For the one mission is not just pronounced along the Sea of Galilee or on the road to Damascus but in your homes and at your places of work and in our church and in the Holy Christian church throughout the world.

Conclusion

Jesus told Paul, "proclaim my name" and he told Peter, "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep." It is interesting that the Epistle for today reminds us so clearly that he who would feed his lambs is the Lamb Himself, the worthy Lamb, the victorious Lamb. He is the Lamb before whom all the hosts of heaven worship forever and ever for to Him belongs the blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever. That is the Lord which Paul saw in glory. But He is also the Lord that Peter saw along the shore of the lake on that beautiful morning as we sang before:

Morning breaks, and Jesus meets us,
Feeds and comforts, pardons still;
As His faithful friends He greets us,
Partners of His work and will.
All our days, on ev'ry shore,
Christ is ours forevermore.

In Jesus' holy name. Amen.