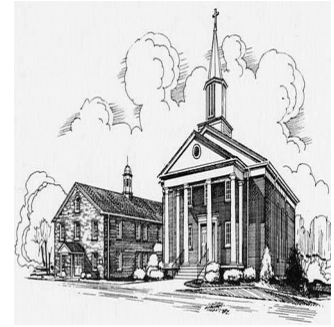


The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Third Sunday of Easter

Year C

RCL



Acts 9:1-20

Psalm 30

John 21:1-19

The Collect

O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Acts 9:1-20

Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 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. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so

they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.” But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the

people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”

Psalm 30 Page 621, BCP

Exaltabo te, Domine

- 1 I will exalt you, O LORD,
because you have lifted me up
and have not let my enemies triumph over me.
- 2 O LORD my God, I cried out to you,
and you restored me to health.
- 3 You brought me up, O LORD, from the dead;
you restored my life as I was going down to the grave.
- 4 Sing to the LORD, you servants of his;
give thanks for the remembrance of his holiness.
- 5 For his wrath endures but the twinkling of an eye,
his favor for a lifetime.
- 6 Weeping may spend the night,
but joy comes in the morning.
- 7 While I felt secure, I said,
“I shall never be disturbed.
You, LORD, with your favor, made me as strong as the mountains.”
- 8 Then you hid your face,
and I was filled with fear.
- 9 I cried to you, O LORD;
I pleaded with the Lord, saying,
- 10 “What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the Pit?
will the dust praise you or declare your faithfulness?”
- 11 Hear, O LORD, and have mercy upon me;
O LORD, be my helper.”
- 12 You have turned my wailing into dancing;
you have put off my sack-cloth and clothed me with joy.
- 13 Therefore my heart sings to you without ceasing;
O LORD my God, I will give you thanks for ever.

John 21:1-19

Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 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. 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.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." 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. 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. 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.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” 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. 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. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disci-

ples after he was raised from the dead.

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.” 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.” 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. 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.” (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

SERMON

For those unaware of the recent tragedy locally, this from Kentucky Today:

A small Kentucky community has rallied around a toddler who is in critical condition after allegedly being shaken by an adult on April 27.

Calliope Anne May, 2, suffered severe injuries to her body and brain, authorities said, after being shaken or slammed by an individual who has been arrested and is in custody.

The Raceland Police Department said in a press release that the toddler was found unresponsive at Foothills Apartments in Wurtland on Saturday at approximately 8 p.m. The child was transported to Our Lady of Bellefonte Hospital and later airlifted to the Cabell Huntington Hospital in Huntington, West Virginia, where she remains in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit listed in critical condition, police said.

The child's diagnosis is non-accidental trauma or closed head injury, said police.

Bobby Lee Brantley, 32, of Ashland was arrested on Monday by the Raceland Police Department in connection to the case on the charge of first-degree criminal abuse of a child.¹

Little Calli, two years old, is in the hospital following brain surgery to attempt to correct injuries inflicted, apparently, by her caretaker, watching her while her mother worked. I am so grateful I don't have to prosecute this case. I do not think I could keep it together. She's two!

This is so close to the case which cost me my previous position, which I had held for 25 years, that I can't help but link the two in my mind. In that case, two drug dealers broke into the home of two other drug dealers. They killed both of them, then locked the kids in a bathroom and set the house on fire. The kids, praise God, got out unharmed, but I had reached some sort of inter-

¹ <http://kentuckytoday.com/stories/kentucky-community-rallies-around-toddler,19239>

nal limit. I hated them with a white-hot hate. I stormed through the office “breathing threats and murder against them”, fueled not only by my own outrage, but by the outrage in the community against these two, which supported and encouraged me. How does anyone get that twisted up? Every fiber of my being was screaming for revenge. What right did these two have to draw breath? I wanted to burn them at the stake. These two had done something I saw as unforgivable, and my entire community, I thought, agreed. That’s humanity’s understanding of what justice demands of people who do awful things. The only “What then” we can conceive of is death.

Then, I had a theophany. God had a little private chat with me, the burden of which was, “That’s not your call, my child. I may have plans, even for these two.” The details of my theophany are between me and my

God, but the command I received was clear. I could follow the law of Kentucky and seek the death penalty or I could follow the teachings of Jesus. And if I chose the latter, my time as a prosecutor was over. It was a moment mirroring another moment, many, many years ago.

Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 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. 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.

"I'm going fishing", Peter said. Perhaps he has some idea of returning to his earlier life, as did I, but notice that six others of his community said to him, "We will go with you." The other Apostles won't permit him to

depart from his calling. They go with him. He is still part of the community, even though he has gone off the tracks. He has been sealed as one of the Community by Jesus Himself. “I’m going fishing”, he says. What did he catch? Nothing. Once he was called, his occupation as a fisherman was over. The only thing is, he doesn’t know it yet and neither did I. I thought I could ask for appointment of an alternate prosecutor and then return to the comfortable six-figure profession which I had followed all my life. I certainly did NOT understand that my encounter with God would lead me to pastoring a church for much less, but for me this was God’s answer to the question, “What then?” That’s God’s way – He recalls those who have departed from His way. Peter was a coward. He denied Christ three times. Paul persecuted the church. He was a bully, but it was these two who were called to lead the new church. God picks the

right people for the job, however unlikely they may seem.

Which brings me back to the man accused of assaulting little Calli, the man I can hardly speak of without choking. What possible outcome can we imagine for him? Well, none. For us, establishing guilt is the end of the tale, and once established, there is no “What then?”.

What if God applied this reasoning to Peter or Paul (or me, come to think about it)? Peter was so terrified that he called down curses on himself rather than admit his relationship with Jesus! That’s Peter screaming, “May lightning strike me where I stand if I’m lying. I don’t know the man!” Of course, after the terror is spent and he realizes what he has done, he wept bitterly, but the other Apostles had heard his denials. How can they ever trust him again?

And let’s not forget Saul, the enemy of the church.

Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 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.

Saul of Tarsus was a dangerous enemy of the followers of the Way, so much so that when he was stricken blind on the road to Damascus and lead, helpless, into the city, Ananias, who was instructed by the Lord to go to him and restore his sight protested.

Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.

Great beginning for the new church we have here — a coward and a bully. Do you begin to get a sense of how differently we would deal with these two as compared to God's way of dealing with them? He restored them to

the roles they were chosen to fulfill. It is very tough for us to be comfortable with God's approach. We're much happier talking about lakes of fire for wrong-doers. God's way is restoration so that they can fulfill their roles in the coming church.

“What then?” is God's sovereign space. If God can say to a coward, “you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church”; can take a villain intent on denying the life, death and resurrection of the Lord and turn him into the Apostle to the Gentiles, if God can take a career prosecutor who has lost his objectivity in his revulsion over other people's sins and turn him into pastor of a church, can He not find use for all of us? This is God's eternal answer to the “What then?” question. Isn't Jesus counseling us to see God even in those who have failed? That's terribly difficult for us, but it is the teachings of Jesus, the Son of God.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Regret looks backward. Choice attends to the present. Restoration looks to the future. We live in a present in which we are focused on the evil acts of evil people. We remember a gentler time and regret its loss. We see no hope for restoration, but we are not God. Faith Fountain, who has sung to us several times, started a fundraiser to help with Calli's medical expenses. She hoped to raise \$500. To date, our local people, our local community, has donated over \$17,000. There was even a prayer vigil for Calli, a stranger to most who attended. Is our time so irredeemably evil as we thought?

“The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you;

The LORD lift up His face on you and give you

peace.”

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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