

Easter 3 – St Aidan’s & Wesley 10.30am – 14th April 2013

Readings: Acts 9:1-20 ‘Saul’s Conversion’

John 21: 1-19 ‘Jesus’ third resurrection appearance’

Theme: “Encountering the risen Lord – sometimes the most unlikely are chosen. ”

Introduction

Two of the most amazing passages of Scripture are part of our Lectionary readings today.

The first reading from Acts 9 recounts the incredible conversion of Saul on the Damascus road, from destroyer of the followers of ‘the Way’, as Jesus’ early believers were known, to one of the key leaders of the early Church and a church ‘planter’ of amazing talent.

The second reading from John 21 recounts the third resurrection appearance of Jesus to some of the disciples as they fished on Lake Tiberius or Lake Galilee, the sharing of breakfast together and then Jesus calling Peter to care for his sheep, his flock, his people.

In both accounts Jesus is not initially recognised.

Saul says, ‘Who are you Lord?’ in Acts 9:1

In John 21:4 we read: “Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus.”

This made me think, ‘How many times do we not recognize Jesus around us, at work in the lives of others, guiding us, encouraging us to be God’s people and to do God’s will in the world?’ An interesting thought!!

The other thing that struck me was the huge difference in these two encounters with the risen Lord. One writer that I read on the Acts passage made the point saying ‘there is no one religious experience that fits all’. Some people suggest that if you haven’t had this or that religious experience then you are not truly a Christian. What a load of rubbish! Here in our two readings for today are amazingly different experiences of the risen Lord that give impetus to the early church in differing ways. Saul’s life is turned around and Peter is given a commissioning to care

for the early, developing faith community. In amongst this the seven fishing all come to recognise Jesus and share breakfast with him on the shore. Naturally, as a fisherman, I love the fact that Jesus came to them and gave them a few pointers on where to fish and enabled them to catch a huge amount of fish. Sometimes I need that help as well to catch my fish!!

Let us take a couple of moments and look at the two accounts we have for today beginning with the Acts passage.

Acts 9:1-19 – The conversion and transformation of Saul

vss 1-2 Here Saul is totally opposed to Jesus' followers.

We have already read in Acts 7:58 that Saul was present at the stoning of Stephen and he continues to persecute the early Christians with the approval of the High Priest

vss 3-9 has the vision of Saul with 'a light from heaven that flashed around him' and left him temporarily blind.

vss 10-16 is the second vision. This time to Ananias and his discussion with the Lord and why he should go to Saul.

vss 17-18a has Ananias going to Saul and healing the blindness.

An interesting imagery 'of scales falling from his eyes' so that Saul can see again physically and spiritually is implied. We still use this saying for when we suddenly understand something which previously we didn't comprehend.

vss 18b – 19 Saul is baptised, restored to health and begins preaching. The about face of Saul has occurred and he becomes known as Paul. By the power of God Saul's life is turned around. We can certainly understand the hesitancy of the early church in initially accepting Saul as a changed individual.

John 21: 1-19

vss 1-3 seven of the disciples go fishing on the Sea of Tiberias

(Roman name) usually called the Sea of Galilee

vss 4-6 Jesus appears on the shore and asks if they've caught anything. Pretty normal conversation. When they say 'No' he tells them to fish on the other side of the boat. At this stage they haven't recognised Jesus for whatever reason but they do as he says.

vss 7-9 tells of the recognition of Jesus which seems associated with the large catch of fish. Simon Peter immediately jumps into the water to get to Jesus bringing back memories of Jesus stilling the storm in Matthew 14:28-32 and where Simon Peter is called to come to Jesus who is walking 'on the water'. Simon Peter sinks and is chastened in that passage for his lack of faith.

vss 10-14 have the disciples eating breakfast with Jesus proving to them that he is not a ghost but has indeed risen as the thinking in ancient times was that ghosts didn't/couldn't eat

vss 15-19 have Simon Peter forgiven and accepted by Jesus.

Three times he is asked to 'feed or take care of the lambs or sheep.' A reflection back to the three times he betrayed Jesus as he faced trial. Here now Jesus tests him and finishes with the words given so long before as he called the disciples; "Follow me!" (similar to John 1:43)

What can we take from these passages for ourselves?

There are at least three things that come to mind immediately.

1. The Lord chooses the most unlikely, on occasions, to do the work required. Saul, a persecutor of the early church community, becomes the number one evangelist. Simon Peter, the disciple

who disowns Jesus in his hour of need, becomes 'the rock upon which the early church' is built. Possibly even we, who seem most unlikely candidates, can be used in a variety of ministry areas.

2. The Lord not only forgives the sins of the past but goes on as if these have been obliterated, holding nothing against us. Imagine us in the early church's situation with Saul – he would have been difficult to trust with his past. Even in the church today we hold grudges against those who have different opinions to our own, who challenge our thinking on issues or look at faith in a different way to our own. Imagine us with a close friend like Simon Peter who completely fails us when we really need them to be there for us. Would we ever be able to forgive, forget and re-instate them to even a higher place in our friendship regime?! It would be and is difficult but this is what Jesus does and we are called to do likewise.
3. The Lord empowers those called to fulfil the tasks asked of them. Both Saul, who is transformed and so changes his name to Paul, and Simon Peter are both given the abilities to do their God given tasks. Sometimes when we are asked to do something in the life of the church we say 'I can't do that and give reasons why we can't'. Here we are encouraged to see that God uses the unlikely and gives them the gifts to do tasks asked of them. May we take hope and assurance from these passages as we are asked to do ministry tasks and not make excuses.

Praise be to God for the words of encouragement found in the Scriptures for us today. Amen.