

## Easter 3C 2022

After the resurrection of Christ, he appears to people several times.

In today's reading, he appears as an expert in fishing who stands on the shore and directs the disciples, some of *them* fisherman, in their attempts.

They do not recognize him as Christ at first, but when they stop trying to control the situation themselves and listen to him, they nevertheless pull in a great haul.

At that point, the disciple whom Jesus loved (generally assumed to be the author, John), recognizes Christ.

It takes us all time to recognize Christ in those we meet, whether in the gardener or in the person on the road to Emmaus.

Like the disciples, we tend not to realize that we are in the presence of Christ until something remarkable occurs.

The reality is, Christ meets us not in some mystical experience, but in the everyday, where Christ helps to remove the blinders that prevent us from seeing anything other than the projections of our own egos.

We get so caught up in our own wishes, needs and desires, in perceived slights and the need to appear certain ways in the eyes of others, that we stop being able to see Christ in ourselves or others.

We get lost, in other words, and cannot see where the fertile ground lies, or, in the case of the disciples, where the productive waters are.

If we put our egos aside and instead seek Christ, then we may have unexpected success, as did the disciples when they followed the instructions of Christ.

Sometimes, when we encounter Christ, we so doubt ourselves and Christ's love that we are overcome.

Peter remembers having denied Christ three times out of fear and is ashamed to be seen by him.

He therefore attempts to hide himself.

He first puts on clothes and is still not satisfied, so he leaps from the boat into the water.

Out of shame or fear or ego, we sometimes desire not to be seen clearly, but we cannot hide from Christ.

Christ sees Peter clearly, and cares only about where Peter is as a person now.

One commentator said that Christ forgives Peter and restores fellowship, but that is a little misleading, if only because we misunderstand what forgiveness means.

Some think that it is simply overlooking evil.

We shrug our shoulders, in other words, and say, "Fine with me. I'll look the other way."

This is not forgiveness, but irresponsibility.

Others understand forgiveness as something conditional, something that must be earned by suffering or sacrifice.

In other words, “You hurt me, so you have to hurt at least as much and then I’ll forgive you.”

This is not forgiveness, but retribution.

Others think that forgiveness is arbitrary, something that we might *not* offer to someone who has truly changed, something that is dependent on whim.

We read this passage, in other words, as if Christ might *not* have forgiven Peter, but happened to be in a good mood that day.

In reality, Christ is always inviting us in.

Love is *always* waiting on reconciliation, always remains open to the return of love.

This does not mean that we allow people to walk over us, but that we are ready to invite someone back in if he decides to love us in return.

This is exactly what Christ does.

He restores fellowship to his disciples who have been thrown off course.

Peter had become alienated through his own fear and subsequent shame, but Christ invites him back in.

Fellowship or community is a key part of Christianity, and Peter, once he comes to his senses, gets out of the water and responds to Christ's call to bring some fish to cook.

*Some* fish were already cooking, so this is an excuse to draw Peter near.

“Bring some fish, Peter, and we'll cook them and eat together.”

Once fellowship is restored, once Peter and Christ are reconciled, Christ encourages Peter in his ministry.

Specifically, he tells Peter to feed his sheep, to go out and serve others.

He does not say that Peter is to convert them to a certain way of thinking, a specific theology or viewpoint, but that he is to feed them.

We do not want to make the mistake of Nicodemus and almost everyone in the gospels who takes Christ literally.

Christ does not mean to give them a sandwich, but to nurture them, to build them up, to help them to grow *when they are ready, when they allow*.

Christians are always looking for ways to invite or guide people into harmonious, loving relationships, to the same kind of fellowship that the disciples enjoy around the fire by the Sea of Galilee.

I fear we think atonement means suffering for our sins or paying God back.

Go does not ask for recompense.

The point is not to pay Christ back or to suffer as a way of atonement, but simply to rejoin Christ with a renewed attitude of love and fellowship, and then to go out and spread that love.

God simply asks that we change our hearts, open them up and let *that* lead where it will.

This is metanoia, thinking on a higher plane.

A person who truly loves us does not want to see us suffer, but to see us healed, freed of all that holds us back.

Such a person wants reconciliation, not retribution.

Christ therefore specifically appears to the disciples when Peter is present *and* vulnerable.

He wants to reach out to him just as he reached out to Thomas last week, when he returned so that Thomas could see and even feel his wounds and not feel alienated from the others who had had a similar opportunity.

Keep in mind that reconciliation only happens when a person's heart has truly changed.

Someone who says "sorry" a hundred times but does not change her ways is not reconciling, but looking for a way to cheat the system.

If we accept false hearts, then we have betrayed the gospel.

When someone has truly opened her heart, *then* we are to accept her with open arms.

That is forgiveness.

Until then, we stand ready.

Forgiveness is not blind, arbitrary, or contingent.

It is a preparedness to join in fellowship, an openness to any sincere openness in others,

a willingness to return love with love, unconditionally.

This is the blessing of resurrection.