

04 MAY 2025 EASTER 3 REFLECTION

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Psalm 30; Acts 9:1-6; John 21:1-19

Two common themes that run through our readings today, are: 'The Faithfulness of God' and 'The Call to Discipleship'.

Our first reading, Psalm 30, is a Psalm of thanksgiving, praising God for deliverance from some kind of catastrophe.

Scholars are not unanimous as to what the catastrophe is. One scholar suggests it was deliverance from a serious illness experienced by David, the psalmist. Vs 2 'I cried to you for help and you have healed me.'

You certainly would be thankful and rejoicing if you recovered from an incurable disease.

Whatever the catastrophe, the psalm expresses the joy of knowing God and God's faithfulness. A prayer has been answered. Faith has been restored, and sorrow has been transformed into pure joy.

When we are engaging with the psalms, we have to remember that the psalms first belonged to the Jewish people. When the psalms were recited, they referred to events known to the Jewish community who recited them.

Christians are quick to Christianize Psalm 30 and quick to transpose on to the psalm, the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus. For Christians, the 'deliverance' is a reference to the resurrection, where Jesus was delivered from death. The psalm fits so well with the Christian description of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Vs3: 'O Lord, you brought me up from Sheol...'

It is a Psalm of thanksgiving. In the psalm, mourning had been turned into dancing. Sackcloth has been replaced by the garments of joy. Hope has come alive again! Death has been defeated by irrepressible hope and irrepressible new life! The Easter Story told in a psalm.

Like Psalm 22, which also seems to describe in more detail the crucifixion of Jesus. In the Church calendar, The Season of Easter lasts for fifty days from the Sunday of Jesus' resurrection to Pentecost Sunday.

During 'The Great Fifty Days' we will be hearing the Bible stories about the Risen Jesus appearing to individuals and appearing to groups of people.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus appears to the discouraged and confused disciples, who have become disheartened by the crucifixion. Despite reports of the resurrection, they do not know what to make of the stories.

Peter is almost ready to return to his old occupation. 'I am going fishing' says the disheartened Peter to the other disciples. I'm going back to the simple life I had before I met Jesus. Going back to the uncomplicated life I had before I joined the failed mission of Jesus!

Like many men, who want to put a bad memory to sleep, Peter buried himself in his work. Fishing was his escape as well as his livelihood. But as the gospel tells us, instead of forgetting about Jesus, Peter and the other disciples saw an apparition of Jesus out on the water, although none of them dared ask who he was.

The presence of Jesus immediately increased the amount and quality of fish they caught that night. They felt themselves to be blessed once again. They remembered the sense of abundance they experienced whenever Jesus was with them. Fish and bread were multiplied, crowds of people were multiplied and followed Jesus everywhere.

In our gospel lesson today, the stunned disciples saw the same mysterious figure of Jesus on the beach, cooking fish, and beckoning them to come and have breakfast! . As he broke bread, they became more and more certain that it was the Lord. His familiar mannerisms. His familiar tone of voice, his humility, convinced them that it was the Risen Jesus - now appearing to them for a third time, since the Upper Room. Jesus called them once again to follow him.

He especially focused on Peter, questioning Peter three times about his commitment: Odd questions, 'Do you love me?' and 'Do you love me more than all the others?' Peter's response was 'Yes, Lord you know that I love you!' And Jesus' final word to Peter, was 'Follow me!'

We know that Peter did follow Jesus, and like Jesus, he was crucified in Rome during the reign of Nero.

Our second reading is also about the call to discipleship. This time Jesus' call was to Saul of Tarsus.

It's a familiar story to most Christians. Saul the Christian persecutor and fundamentalist Jew believes he is doing God's will by killing non-Jews.

After witnessing the deaths of so many faithful Christians, (including Stephen), Saul began to question his own faith and question his own 'images of God'.

In the figure of Jesus, he began to see God as a God of grace and forgiveness. Not the angry, punishing God that drove him to kill Christians.

The term, 'Damascus Road Experience' has come to mean 'a radical realization' and 'a massive turnaround' in one's beliefs and values..

As Saul reflected on the image of Jesus on the cross, and as he reflected on the many deaths, he had caused, he experienced a massive conversion and became Christianity's greatest apologist and advocate. He followed Jesus to the place of his own execution. Tradition has it that Paul was beheaded, because he was a Roman Citizen (No Roman citizen could be crucified)..

These Great Fifty Days of Easter is a good time for each of us to recall our own conversions and examine our own calling to the Christian life.

I invite you to think for a moment about three simple 'why' questions:

'Why' do you continue to believe in Christ?

Why do you keep coming to church? .

Why do you keep coming to this church of St Columba's?

Let's reflect briefly on those 'why ' questions:

'Why' do you/l continue to believe in Christ?

I can't answer that question for you, but as I have talked to Christians over the years, the answer as to why they continue to believe is usually because of 'an accumulation of 'Christ' experiences'. Rather like the appearances of Jesus to the disciples during the Great Fifty Days, where Jesus made himself visible on several occasions.

He appeared in the testimony of Mary Magdalene and the women who visited the empty tomb. He appeared in the experience of the Upper Room.

He appeared in the experience we read about today - on the sea, and at breakfast on the beach. In the breaking of bread and in the sharing of a meal. Christ was in all these events..

In the accumulation of these events the disciples came to believe.

Maybe you can claim to have met Jesus in many places/spaces in your life. You may have met Jesus in the witness of others. You have met Jesus in your own experience of the Spirit.

You may have met Jesus in a crisis in your life and been delivered from that crisis. Or you sense the presence of Christ every day, as you go about your day. Maybe your initial conversion experience was a 'Damascus Road Experience' and that experience is strong enough to keep you in the Faith.

The second question: Why do you keep coming to Church?

The traditional reasoning for coming to church, has usually been along the lines that once you become a Christian, you keep your faith alive by joining a faith community. Since the beginning of the Church, Christians have been encouraged to engage in regular, corporate worship.

Many of us were brought up in Christian families where going to church was a natural thing to do.

Another good reason why we continue meeting is that we love Jesus. We believe Jesus loves us and invites us into fellowship with God the Spirit.

There are many reasons why people come to church.

The Third Question is: Why do we keep coming to this church of St Columba's?

I think part of the answer to that question is because of the kind of church that St Columba's is.

We are a bunch of like-minded people even though we are a diverse group. We value and respect other people and believe everyone should do it.

My own initial experience of St Columba's, when I was invited to be your minister, six years ago, was that I found the people of St Columba's to be warm and friendly, open-hearted and open-minded, non-judgemental and a parish that welcomes all kinds of people..

By 'all kinds of people' I mean that the church is culturally diverse and theologically diverse with a huge dollop of mutual respect and tolerance.

While we are an older congregation, we would love to welcome younger members and families into our church family. We are flexible enough to change, if need be.

We have lots of weekly activities including prayer and Bible study, an exercise group, a 'knit and natter' group. Women's groups. A men's group. A wonderful book shop and an iconic mini market in the warmer months. We raise our singing groups for special occasions, and we enjoy being together.

We value liberal education and engaging with the 'world' . Our Environmental group (SCHNEG) made St Columba's one of the first ecochurches in the country. We value Faith and Reason and making a difference in the community.

We identify with the Presbyterian system of Church government which is basically democratic.

Our style of worship is contemporary traditional and liturgical, although we are very relaxed and try to create worship that connects with the church and un-church. During the Great Fifty Days, let us pray that we will meet the Risen Christ again and that we may have the love and strength to follow Him.

PRAYER

Loving God, as we go out from here into another week
We pray that we may meet the Risen Christ again.
Help us to recognize Him in the ordinariness of our lives.
In our daily labours, in the meals we share with loved ones.
In the storms of life and in the calm and peace.
Call us again by our name and make us your own people.
Show us the mission field where you want us to labour.
Turn our mourning into dancing, and our sorrow into joyful praise.
Through Christ our Risen Lord. Amen.