

April 18, 2010  
Easter 3  
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There's just something about the number 3.

- Three strikes and you're out.
- The three "R's" Reduce, reuse, recycle.
- A good joke begins with "3 people walked into a bar"
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> time is a charm.
- And of course, 3 children, the perfect number for our family.

Jesus asks Simon Peter three times, "Do you love me? And Peter answers three times, "Yes, I do." Most scholars believe that Peter's threefold profession of love parallels his threefold denial in the garden, on the night Jesus was betrayed. You might remember the scene on that night when Peter is standing next to a charcoal fire and a woman identifies him as a follower of Jesus. Peter emphatically says, "I don't know him; No it's not me; I'm telling you I do not know the man." And suddenly the cock crows and Peter remembers what Jesus had said, that Peter would deny him 3 times before the cock crows.

Now on this bright morning at seaside, once again standing next to a charcoal fire, Jesus appears to the disciples for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time and, as one writer observes: Peter is given the chance to fill the hole he dug for himself with three huge shovelfuls of love. Suddenly it is clear. Jesus has made this encore appearance for Peter's benefit. In the same way Jesus returned for Thomas, to move him from doubt to faith, he now returns for Peter, to move him from faith to action.

Perhaps in these days after resurrection we need this encounter as much as Peter did. We, too, have come down from the high slopes of Easter and now find ourselves stuck in the same sea-level routine. We have seen the risen Christ and believed, but what difference has it made? We encounter Jesus, and then go on with life as if nothing had happened: our jobs, our interests, our friends and lovers, our iPhones and Facebook posts, and maybe enjoying those things—sweets or meat—that we went without during Lent. But life isn't the same. Perhaps, having heard the invitation to follow so long ago, we need to hear it again, and then act.

It was just three weeks ago that many of us gathered around a charcoal fire outside our church for the Easter Vigil. From that fire we lit this Christ candle that stands in the center of our gathering throughout the year. Gathered around this fire, the questions and commands from Jesus at the seashore travel over time and space to us in the hustle and bustle of the city, 2010:

To Peter, Jesus asked "Do you love me? Then feed and tend my sheep."

And to each of us he asks, "Do you love me?" Then serve others, proclaim the good news, and strive for peace.

How do we love Jesus? How is our faith shown in word and in deeds? Similar questions are asked, and promises made, when we confirm our faith; and as children and adults are baptized the pastor says, "You have made public profession of your faith (love). Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in Holy Baptism:

- To live among God's faithful people,
- To hear the word and share in the Lord's Supper
- To proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed
- To serve all people following the example of Jesus
- And to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

And just as emphatically as Peter we respond, "Yes, and I ask God to help and guide me!"

So we ask it again and again as we gather with one another in this place, God, help my unbelief, calm my fears, guide me in the words I use and in all my daily acts: the way I spend my money, the manner in which I treat both friend and stranger, the integrity in which I do my job, raise my children or treat my parents. God, give me wisdom and courage to take a stand on behalf of others, guide me in all my daily encounters and in how I care for this earth.

Throughout this Easter season as we remember our baptism, we affirm our love and faith in the one who empowers us with mystery and joy in the resurrection. Together we affirm our faith in God and our love for Jesus when, during worship, in both playful and profound ways, drops of water land on our heads, our bodies or even our eyeglasses. These sprinkles and splashes of water remind us once again in whose name we are baptized, and who gives us love and life and hope beyond comprehension.

This morning, we don't gather seaside, eating fish around a fire, to hear Jesus ask the questions and receive his invitation to follow. But we do gather just blocks from a lake, and eat a festive meal—also hosted by the Risen Lord—by candlelight. And we have a similar encounter in water, word and meal: expressing our love for Jesus and being strengthened to follow, to love and tend both the poor and the powerful on behalf this Jesus, part of another threesome, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.