

Bible Challenge - April 10 - 16, 2016

INTRODUCTION

The disciples make a big splash and breakfast with the risen Jesus in the gospel. Wading in the water (remembering our baptism) and eating with Jesus (celebrating the Holy Communion) is our weekly encounter with the risen Christ. Jesus asks us, with Peter, again and again: Do you love me? And Jesus invites us, again and again, to follow him bringing the Easter life to others.

FIRST READING: Acts 9:1-6 [7-20]

Each of us has a story of meeting God's grace. Saul (later called Paul) was an ardent persecutor of all who followed the Way of Christ. This reading recounts the story of his transformation, beginning with an encounter with Jesus Christ on the way to Damascus.

¹Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and 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. ³Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." [⁷The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. ⁸Saul 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. ⁹For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹The 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, ¹²and 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." ¹³But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; ¹⁴and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." ¹⁵But 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; ¹⁶I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷So 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." ¹⁸And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, ¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, ²⁰and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."]

Adventure Challenge: Acts 7:34 – 8:3 and 9:1-31.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* With a Bible map and references, determine how far Damascus is from Jerusalem, and what Paul's journey would have been like. Where are these cities in relation to Tarsus, Paul's home?

Option B. Research what is known about Ananias.

PSALM: Psalm 30 *You have turned my wailing into dancing. (Ps. 30:11)*

The Psalmist is thankful for recovery, perhaps from an actual illness. The healing may be metaphorical, but the speaker has gone from prosperity to near death to joy.

¹I will exalt you, O LORD, because you have lifted me up
and have not let my enemies triumph over me.

²O LORD my God, I cried out to you,
and you restored me to health.

³You brought me up, O LORD, from the dead;

you restored my life as I was going down to the grave.
⁴Sing praise to the LORD, all you faithful;
give thanks in holy remembrance.
⁵God's wrath is short; God's favor lasts a lifetime.
Weeping spends the night, but joy comes in the morning.
⁶While I felt secure, I said,
"I shall never be disturbed."
⁷You, LORD, with your favor, made me as strong as the mountains."
Then you hid your face, and I was filled with fear.
⁸I cried to you, O LORD;
I pleaded with my Lord, saying,
⁹"What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit?
Will the dust praise you or declare your faithfulness?"
¹⁰Hear, O LORD, and have mercy upon me;
O LORD, be my helper."
¹¹You have turned my wailing into dancing;
you have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.
¹²Therefore my heart sings to you without ceasing;
O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.

Adventure Challenge: Read an alternative translation of this Psalm, or compare it to Psalm 31.

Explorer Challenge: Research any words that may be somewhat unfamiliar. Examples: *extol*, *Sheol*, *the Pit*, *sackcloth*.

SECOND READING: Revelation 5:11-14

The vision of John recorded in Revelation offers a glimpse of cosmic worship on the Lord's Day. At its center is "the Lamb who was slain."

¹¹Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹²singing with full voice,
"Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!"
¹³Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them,
singing,
"To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might
forever and ever!"
¹⁴And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Adventure Challenge: Revelation 5.

Explorer Challenge: Read Revelations 4:7-11 to learn who are "the four living creatures"; then read Ezekiel 1, the probable source of this image. How are Ezekiel and Revelation alike?

GOSPEL: John 21:1-19

The risen Christ appears again to his disciples by the sea where they were first called. After echoes of the fishing and feeding miracles, he gives a final reminder of the cost of a disciple's love and obedience.

¹After [he appeared to his followers in Jerusalem,] Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³Simon 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.

⁴Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶He 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. ⁷That 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. ⁸But 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.

⁹When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹So 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. ¹²Jesus 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. ¹³Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵When 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." ¹⁶A 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." ¹⁷He 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. ¹⁸Very 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." ¹⁹(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

Adventure Challenge: John 21.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Verse 14 indicates this is the third time (in John's gospel) that the risen Jesus appears; read (or re-read) John 20, last week's Gospel text, to remind yourself of the other two occasions. What similarities and differences do you see in these three appearances?

Option B. The language and details of John 21 have prompted considerable scholarly analysis and speculation. Use a reference Bible, a commentary, or other research tools to learn some of what has been written about this passage.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Eternal and all-merciful God, with all the angels and all the saints we laud your majesty and might. By the resurrection of your Son, show yourself to us and inspire us to follow Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Our hearts burn within us while you open to us the scriptures. (Luke 24:32)