

**Texts: Acts 9:1-20; Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19**

**What does it mean for you today, right now, that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead? What has changed in your life since Easter day?**

**I still remember the days right after my father died. John and I were in Loveland, my mom was really sick, and we were going back and forth between planning his funeral and visiting her in the hospital. I was in a daze. One night as we sat in a restaurant, I looked around and said, “All these other people in here have no idea what is going on. They are just living their regular lives.”**

**Maybe you have had a similar experience of dislocation and disruption. It can happen in all sorts of ways – a death, a diagnosis, a divorce. An accident, a natural disaster. How do you make sense of that kind of change? You long for normal, whatever normal is.**

**I think Peter and the other disciples were longing to something that was familiar. Everything in their lives had been disrupted. Fishing is what they knew. Fishing is what they did. But resurrection just keeps on breaking through the familiar and the routine. Jesus shows up on the shore of the Sea of Tiberius, calling them once again. “Children, you have no fish, have you? Cast the net to the right side of the boat and you will find some.”**

**And then there is Saul. Talk about disruption. Saul first shows up in the book of Acts as the Jewish council drags Stephen off to be stoned. He watches with approval as Stephen is killed. He breathes threats and murder against the Jews who have begun to follow the way of Jesus Christ. He drags people out of their houses and throws them in prison. It would be hard to find a more disagreeable character.**

**But Jesus does find him. A blinding light throws Saul to the ground and he hears Jesus speak to him. “Why do you persecute me?” Saul had never seen Jesus the man and he doesn’t recognize the voice.**

**In both these stories, resurrection breaks through the narrative. It messes with the way we thought the story would end. Resurrection turns all our human expectations upside down. Because resurrection is about life breaking through death. Resurrection is about life when you thought everything around you was dead.**

**Not many of us can tell quite so dramatic a story of conversion as Saul could tell, once he had changed his name to Paul. Some of us have been Christians for our entire lives. We may not even remember being baptized because we were babies when it happened. So we were pretty unaware when Jesus Christ called us to be disciples. We don’t think of ourselves as missionaries like Paul because missionaries travel to far-off places. Some of you have lived right around here your whole life. Most of us – let’s face it – don’t want to compare the stories of our lives of faith with someone like Paul, or someone like Peter. We feel insecure, inadequate. We don’t think we have much of a story to tell.**

**Let’s go back for a moment to Peter and the other disciples on the beach with Jesus. After they haul in a boatload of fish, the next thing Jesus says to them is this: “Bring some of the fish you have caught and come have breakfast.”**

**Would you have recognized the man on the beach, inviting you to share a meal of bread and fish? Bread and fish – now that’s a clue. We’ve heard about bread and fish before in John’s gospel. How 5,000 people ate their fill of bread and fish and there were 12 baskets full left over. Resurrection brings the story full circle. Jesus is still feeding people. His abundance and generosity continue. Up to this very day.**

**What does it mean for you today, that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead? What has changed in your life since Easter day?**

**Jesus keeps on appearing to his disciples. How has he shown up in front of you?**

**Your leadership team, the congregation council, has started to read a book together. The author, a Lutheran pastor named Dave Daubert, claims that there are three marks of a vibrant faith community: 1. praying together; 2. reading Scripture together, and 3. talking together about what we have heard God tell us in our prayers and in our Scripture reading.**

**We do some of that right here in worship. We pray together. We certainly read Scripture and then generally you listen to me talk about what we have read. But how much of my sermon do you remember even an hour after you leave? More than once one of you has said to me back there at the door, “Good message, Pastor.” “What did you hear me say?” I’ve asked. “I can’t remember,” you’ve replied, “but it was good.”**

**Pastor Daubert writes that the single most important factor for people to remember what they heard in church is to talk about it afterwards. It doesn’t matter where that conversation takes place. Maybe it’s downstairs over coffee. Maybe it’s at Country Kitchen over brunch. Maybe it’s in the car on the way home. When you take a few minutes to talk about what you heard, it’s more likely you will make a connection to what God is up to in your life.**

**So take a moment right now to pull one of those slips of paper out of the pew rack. This is what is written on them: “Jesus is risen, therefore...” How would you complete that sentence? What difference does the risen Christ make in your life each day? What has changed in your life since Easter day?**

**Take a moment to finish that sentence...**

**And then, take that slip of paper with you when you leave. Use it to start a conversation, whether it's over coffee in the fellowship hall, or around the table as you eat lunch today, or as you hang out with family or friends this afternoon. How do you live now that Christ has risen from the dead? How has resurrection broken through the story of your life?**

**These Bible stories that we read, the story of Saul's conversion from persecutor to missionary, the story of Jesus inviting Peter and the other disciples to breakfast. These are not just stories from long ago. These are not "once upon a time." These are not fables with a moral for an ending. These are stories of God at work changing the lives of the unlikeliest of people.**

**What difference does the risen Christ make in your life?**

**We are Easter people. Our story is how we experience the risen Christ. Our story is how Jesus' life, death and resurrection have become real in our own lives. How because of Jesus, everything is different in our own lives. Just like the disciples running from their fishing boats to gather around a charcoal fire on the beach. Just like Saul, thrown to the ground and blinded, being led to a stranger's house in Damascus. Where do you hear Jesus' voice? Where do you touch his body? Where do you see him?**

**The risen Jesus still appears among us. He is here right now. We hear his voice, the very Word of God, speaking to us in the words of scripture, in the words of hymns. We touch his very own body when we eat bread and drink wine at the table with him. We see him, his very own face, in the face of every person we meet.**

**Jesus was really and truly alive. To claim that statement as fact is to understand that our present reality – this life that you live, in this community, in this day and age – is the very place where Jesus can and will enter your own life.**

**The good news is not something that happened long ago and far away. The good news continues. Christ continues to feed and guide and call and empower you, his disciples, for ministry. The light still shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it. Resurrection is real. Resurrection is here. Resurrection changes everything.**

**Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**