

Easter 3C: 5/5/19
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“Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior?”

That’s a pivotal question during the baptismal liturgy just as parents and godparents are being introduced and, well, examined.

It works like this:

I invite the congregation to turn to page 302 in the Prayer Book.

Now this is a part of the baptismal liturgy we don’t experience if we’re not celebrating an baptism.

But during an actual baptism, I’d be standing over here with the baptismal party taking center stage

as I ask them six ancient questions, beginning with –

Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God? *I renounce them.*

Do you renounce all the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God? *I renounce them.*

Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God? *I renounce them.*

These are called the enunciations.

What exactly are you leaving behind in order to turn to Jesus?

And then, just to emphasize that we’re talking about real movement, I walk over here to ask the final three questions.

You may notice that the baptism folks really do turn when asked --

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? *I do.*

Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love? *I do.*

Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord? *I do.*

These are called the affirmations, because turning to Jesus is about actively taking on something new and life-changing.

And while I’m over here I point out that we’re now oriented toward the side of the church with the Paschal Candle,

first lit on Easter Eve as we celebrate Jesus’ Passover from death to life.

Now that's quite a turn.

Following Jesus, loving Jesus, is all about turning toward Jesus just (as Presiding Bishop Michael Curry says) like a flower turns and grows toward the sun.

Turn, as some of you know, is the first of the seven words in the "Way of Love" practices for a Jesus-centered life that we introduced in the Sunday and Wednesday Lenten classes.

But we're not done yet.

The hope is that we'll all be working these words, living these practices, the rest of our lives.

It all begins with turning toward Jesus.

To pause, listen and follow.

I've been looking for a chance to share this in a sermon, and today's lections handed it to me on a silver platter.

You heard that story in our first reading, from Acts, about how a murderous, fire-breathing guy named Saul turned into our namesake Paul.

You'll not find any St. Saul's Churches, will you, for that man dedicated himself to persecuting and killing followers of the Way, as the earliest Christians were known.

(The Way . . . of Love, get it?)

If we were to encounter someone like Saul we'd likely want to write him off. But not Jesus.

Saul was blinded by the light of Christ.

In the verses just beyond that short teaser we heard, it says that Saul's eyes were opened – but he still couldn't see.

He ended up going to Damascus after all, *not* to persecute Jesus' followers but to be healed by them.

It wasn't until Saul was welcomed (rather reluctantly, I'd suspect) by the Christian community that "something like scales" fell from his eyes

and his sight restored.

He saw that he needed to turn to Jesus and accept him as his Savior,
and be baptized.

And it was later still, over time, that he became known as Paul.

Even with one of the most dramatic “conversion” stories in all of scripture,
Paul wasn’t once and done.

He turned – and turned again – and kept turning -- to Jesus.

This dynamic is even more evident in today’s gospel.

It’s near the end of John’s Gospel, and

the resurrected Christ is hosting breakfast on the beach,
telling Peter to “feed his sheep” even as he feeds Peter.

It’s an idyllic scene, but we know that

that’s not how it always was between them.

Peter had first turned to Jesus at the beginning of the gospel
when Jesus called him to follow.

Even after Peter turned his whole life upside down
joining Jesus to fish for people,

he kept going off track. Forgetting things.

Misunderstanding things, and jumping to knuckle-headed conclusions.

And when Jesus needed Peter most, he denied him. Three times.

Throughout the gospel Peter turns – and turns again –
and keeps turning to Jesus.

Here on the beach that glorious morning

he pauses with Jesus, listens to Jesus, and turns to follow yet again.

Jesus warns Peter that he’ll have plenty of reasons to give up or go astray.

But more often than not, Peter chooses to turn to Jesus

and accept him, serve him, as his Savior.

I said earlier that we only answer that pivotal question about turning to Jesus
when we use the full baptismal liturgy during baptisms.

Maybe that’s so only in the most literal sense.

Whenever we celebrate the baptismal liturgy,

as we do every Sunday this season of Easter,
we renew (as we will momentarily) our Baptismal Covenant.
We promise to do things that we could only do “with God’s help.”

Shall we pause in that moment,
listen with our hearts,
and turn to Jesus?
And, then, as we leave this place and go about our busy lives,
continue to turn to Jesus.
Again. And again. And again.

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