

Third Sunday of Easter
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason S. Glombicki
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The leading cause of death in the United States in 2013 was heart disease.¹ What's interesting about heart disease is that many forms can be prevented or treated with healthy lifestyle choices. Sure, surgeons can re-do the plumbing of the heart, that's easy. The harder part is getting patients to comply with lifestyle changes to quit smoking or eat differently. One statistic suggests that compliance rates are as low as 20% post-surgery.² Why? Well, part of it is the difference between two types of change – technical change and adaptive change. Technical changes are easy solutions that often have apparent solutions, like a needed routine surgery. While adaptive change requires an alteration in beliefs, roles, relationships, or approaches, like a diet overhaul. In short, with technical change you *do* something different, and with adaptive change you *think* different.³

Change is what today's gospel notes is a defining characteristic of resurrection. We find in John's epilogue that some of the disciples were fishing at night. Did you catch one peculiar detail about Peter during this fishing trip? He's naked (John 21:7)! There they are fishing, Peter is naked, and they haven't caught anything. From the shore Jesus tells them to put the net out on the other side. They listen, and catch a whole lot of fish. Ok. Time out. What kind of change is moving the net from one side of the boat to the other – technical or

¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/deaths.htm>

² <http://www.davidlose.net/2014/02/adaptive-and-technical-change/>

³ <http://www.davidlose.net/2014/02/adaptive-and-technical-change/>

adaptive? Technical. This is a quick, routine fix by doing something different. In our lives we use technical changes a lot. If the door lock is broken, we replace the lock. If we are consistently late to work, we take a new method or route. Technical change. It's simple, clear, and we *love* this type of change.

Anyway, back to the story. Peter then puts *on* clothes before he dives in the water, which is odd, right? The rest of the disciples bring in all the fish. Right there on the shore they start having a holy barbeque. Here they notice the presence of Christ in water and a meal. These are keywords for us Christians. Water reminds us of finding God in? Baptism. A meal shared reminds us of finding God in? Communion. I could make a whole sermon on these two images, but today we're after a different catch.

In verse 14 we hear an important sentence: "This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead." This is a key sentence for this final resurrection story in John. If they've seen Jesus two times in the flesh already, why in the world is business going on as usual? Why are they out fishing? Where's the mission work, the preaching, the teaching, and the sharing that the disciples are known for?

I think the problem is that up to this point resurrection for them has been a technical change – dead Jesus is now living Jesus. Technical changes are typically more simplistic. We find it easier to take a pill than cultivate a life of wholeness. It's more efficient to blame another for a miscommunication than to analyze the barriers on both sides. It's faster to make a quick change than to discern a pathway.

While resurrection *can* be about technical change, resurrection is *almost always* about adaptive change. Adaptive change is complex. Adaptive change looks like Jesus asking Peter, “Do you love me?” Then Peter, in the same number of times he denied Jesus, Peter affirms his love for Jesus. After each affirmation, Jesus commissions Peter to feed and tend his flock. Well, what in the world is Peter to do with that? When has anyone been sent by Jesus to feed *his* flock? Up to this point, never. The only other time we hear about sheep in John is when Jesus notes *his* relationship to the sheep. Now Jesus notes Peter’s relationship to the sheep. This, for Peter, requires adaptive change. This requires something new and a change in mentality. In Acts we’ll hear that as the church is birthed they’ll wrestle with growth, we’ll hear the church struggle with disagreement, and in today’s reading we heard of the church’s persecution by Saul. *AND* we’ll also hear that God provides a group of faithful followers who adapt to the changes and challenges, we’ll hear of new leaders coming on board as the community grows, and we’ll hear Saul take the Christian name Paul as his beliefs, relationships, and approaches adaptively change. However, Paul will first go blind in his conversation before he’s clear on his mission, and that’s understandable. Adaptive change is blinding, unpredictable, and risky before it becomes clear.

That's true for our lives and our ministry too. A great example came in a follow up conversation with a few visitors. While we were talking I began explaining that we are a RIC, or Reconciling in Christ, congregation that welcomes and affirms all people. We include everyone no matter what label the world gives or what label you embrace – African American, single, gay, old, Latino, republican, straight, poor, White, young, female, transgender, child, democrat, married, lesbian, seeker, Asian, Christian, rich, divorced, and you get the picture. The visitors noted that during their visits they *experienced* that welcome. They could tell that it was more than just words on a page. To them it was refreshing, and to me that is resurrection. You see, resurrection means embracing the love and grace of the Gospel and changing for the better. Resurrection is creating a community where after 10 years of a clear *statement* of welcome it can bloom into a *place* of welcome. Then after years of work it becomes more than the pastor, or the greeters, or the ushers who engage visitors, instead everyone plays a role in being hospitable. That is resurrection.

Resurrection is also coming to see your life in balance – finding time to play, eat right, exercise, laugh, and connect deeply with others. Resurrection is sharing your gifts abundantly with others because, honestly, you've got it better off than most in the world. Resurrection is changing to embrace life in the midst of a debilitating diagnosis. In all these examples resurrection *is* about adaptive change. Resurrection is about thinking and responding differently.

Adaptive change is how ELCA World Hunger has made resurrection come alive. While some service agencies go into places of need and throw money or items into technical changes, ELCA World Hunger's approach is different. Because our faith is rooted in relationships and conversation, that is where ELCA World Hunger starts. They use our network of churches and organizations across the globe to connect first. From there they listen to local needs and allow the communities to identify solutions before acting.⁴ Sure, this process might take a little longer, but its impact is great. For example, when Oliven took a picture next to her fruit trees in Nicaragua it was more than trees she shared; it was an example of resurrection. Oliven now knows how to grow, knows how to raise chickens, knows how to set up irrigation systems, and she knows how to manage a small business. Because of that knowledge, her family eats better and lives more sustainably.⁵ ELCA World Hunger's adaptive techniques encouraged resurrection.

Embracing adaptive change to think differently may well bring us the new life we need too. While we live in a world of terrorists, might God be calling us to think of broader response to fear? With now a third shooting in Wicker Park this year,⁶ is it time to change the way we think about gun violence? Through these Easter texts is God calling us to think differently about our faith to realize that it's not about intellectual explanation but rather it's about experiencing resurrection?

⁴ <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/ELCA-World-Hunger/Our-Approach>

⁵ http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ELCA_World_Hunger_Reproducible_Story_2014.pdf?_ga=1.130169290.499766541.1459449093

⁶ <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20160310/wicker-park/first-fatal-wicker-park-shooting-of-2016-has-neighborhood-on-edge>

Indeed, resurrection is all around us. Our world, our congregation, and our lives are in constant change. As a resurrected people we step into change and realize that new ways of thinking and experiencing the world can be expressions of God. Adaptive change sometimes means saying goodbye to things we enjoy, like nightly pizza, and adaptive change also means saying hello to new things, like a healthy lifestyle. It wasn't easy for Peter to go from naked fishing to tending Christ's flock. His change was full of unknowns and the uncertain. Yet, today's gospel reminds us that adaptive change is resurrection, and resurrection is full of abundance.

Today we walk into the changes and challenges of life knowing that God is present with us... in this holy meal, in our baptismal calling, and in the world. We know that God gives us strength to adapt and the courage to live out the resurrection. Friends, *you* are sent to care for Christ's world. Let's continue to be adaptive and to share in Christ's resurrection. Amen.