

Third Sunday in Easter
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason S. Glombicki
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Late last year, I was selected to serve on the Pre-election Canvass Committee to help with the search of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod's next bishop. And if you don't know what "synod" means, it's basically a grouping of churches around Chicago that partner for ministry. Now, the worst decision that this committee ever made was to elect me one of the co-chairs. You see, the synod doesn't know what to do when I champion transparency and open-communication. Maybe I do it because I'm a millennial or maybe it's.... No, it's because I'm a millennial. I hate restrictions unless there is a legitimate explanation. And, so, when I read today's gospel, I see a glimpse of God acting a bit like a millennial.

You see, today's gospel comes from the final chapter of John. And, the funny thing about this chapter is that most scholars believe it is an epilogue added after the rest of John was written. Now, you don't often add to something unless that thing needs clarification or correction. Some scholars argue that it was added to emphasize the authority of Peter in the leadership of the church, as opposed to the "beloved disciple" so frequently mentioned in John's gospel. But, I want to explore what the epilogue does to me, to us, and to those of us yearning to experience the resurrection.

Theologians talk about how Jesus asked Peter about love three times. They draw a connection between Peter's three denials before Jesus's crucifixion. They talk about how Jesus kept pushing Peter to name a specific type of love. That's because Jesus kept asking Peter if he loved with *agape*, that is a self-emptying/universal kind of love,

but, every single time, Peter responds with *philia*, or a friendship kind of love. However, I'm most moved by Peter's emotion that third time. Our translation of verse 17 says Peter "felt hurt." But, the original Greek is a bit stronger saying that Peter felt grieved, sad, sorry, heavy, or full of sorrow.

And, I have to remember everything that's happened up to this point. Sure, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times and he reframed his love for Jesus three times, but Peter also didn't recognize Jesus on the shore, Peter put up a sink about Jesus washing his feet (John 13:6-11), and Peter was the one who chopped off the slave's ear during Jesus's arrest (John 18:10). Time and again, Peter struggled to comprehend the mode of God's presence in the world. So, it's no surprise that after Jesus's resurrection Peter *still* doesn't understand God's movement and, for that, he is full of sorrow.

And, I don't know about you, but I too have found myself in that place. The place where I cannot believe how dense I've been and how I've missed God's movement yet again. Often times it comes for me when I think I already know how God works. I come with pre-determined ways of experiencing God's presence. And maybe you've felt it too. For you, it could be the experience when a physical or mental illness seemed like divine terrorism. Maybe when the beliefs of your childhood church or parents have limited your experience of God. Perhaps when tradition and status quo become what you worship. Or, when the Bible becomes your God. When shame clouds your vision. When society tells you that capitalism, democracy, and the United States are your savior. You see, over and over again, so many things get in the way of experiencing God's true gifts.

But, this Epilogue to John helps to open our mind. For, we find that new life wasn't limited to one early Sunday morning at a single tomb near Jerusalem. Instead,

resurrection was present when an abundance of fish were caught. Resurrection was present when Christ was discovered in the sharing of a meal around a fire. Resurrection was present when Peter acknowledged the calling to serve all people. So too, resurrection is present here and now. And, while Jesus may have walked the earth in a limited time, in a limited geography, and with a limited group of people, God's presence cannot and will not be contained.

And, today's gospel gives us the tools to respond to that gift. It points us to follow Christ's example. It points us back to Jesus's legacy. It reminds us that in our generosity, God is present. It reminds us that in our radical love, God is present. It reminds us that resurrection was not a once and done thing. Resurrection is an on-going, never-ending, ever-expanding experience of renewal. With that in mind, I wonder: Where have you seen resurrection lately? Where have love and generosity shown you God's presence in the world? Take a moment to ponder.

For me, I found a moment of resurrection last week on that pre-election committee. I had gathered information, talked to synod leaders, and advocated for making recordings of the bishop's forums available to the synod. There was a substantial amount of resistance. While I believe that everyone was working with pure intentions and with the good of the synod in mind, I felt like tradition and status quo had become our idol. Just when I had lost all hope, a flicker of potential appeared. It was in one conversation. One turned into two, turned into three, and soon my fellow co-chair and I were presenting at the synod council meeting. In a synod that has mostly rejected social media and the contemporary uses of the internet as platforms for engagement, we were finally able to get funding to have half of the forums recorded.

In that, we were able to open the door wider, follow God's example to color outside the lines, and in that moment, I saw God's movement.

So, there it is. Today's gospel reminds us that this whole thing of resurrection and the possibility of something new taking life is not only a historical event. Rather, the gift of Easter is that we live surrounded by new life every day. And we're given the opportunity to see God's movement here, there, and everywhere as we become channels for God's love and generosity within the world. Today, I'm thankful for Peter's story that enlivens that truth. Amen.