

May 1, 2022 - 3rd Sunday of Easter - a reflection

Acts 9:1-6,(7-20); Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19

“He Came Back for Me”

In one of C. S. Lewis' Narnia stories, “The Horse and His Boy”, he describes a time when Shasta (the boy) has successfully brought a warning of an impending attack by an enemy. He is then given a horse and instructed to follow the group as they return to the Castle in order to mount a defense. The horse he was given did not cooperate with his poor riding skills and he soon found himself alone on the trail and completely lost while the rest of the group hurried to prepare for the battle. He begins to feel very sorry for himself while the horse continues to plod along not paying any attention to his attempts to make it go faster or change directions. To make matters worse a thick fog envelopes the mountain pass upon which they are traveling so he can't even see where he is going. He begins to cry but stops when he perceives someone (or something) walking beside him. His traveling companion turns out to be Aslan (the Christ figure in the Narnia stories) who reveals that he had been caring and protecting Shasta for some time. Shasta begins to realize that what he thought about his lot in life was, in fact, off the mark. Rather than being lost and abandoned he was, in fact, a precious and protected friend of Aslan the powerful. He still had some difficulties to face and his journey was not exactly any easier but the knowledge of the connection with Aslan did make a large difference to his outlook on life. Aslan had been his protector since childhood and so he felt much less lost. The revelation which he received made a difference as did the fact that Aslan had come back for him in his lost state. The disciples of Jesus felt lost and abandoned after the crucifixion and were still in that state of mind immediately following the resurrection even after they knew that Jesus was alive. All of us have probably felt this sense of 'lostness' from time to time so it helps us to remember that Christ has not abandoned us and he will come back for us.

Another person about whom we are thinking today is the apostle Paul at the time of his conversion. Saul of Tarsus was a man on a mission. Following his years of training as a Pharisee and his personal devotion to what he perceived to be God's plan for the world Saul was heading for Damascus to arrest those whom he felt would damage the work of God. He had experienced some success on this project already when he stood and witnessed the stoning of Stephen. Saul probably felt that he was succeeding in following God but as we look at these events from our perspective we know that Saul had lost his way and was heading down a path that God had not blessed. Saul didn't realize how lost he was and so he charged forward with the license to arrest safely tucked in his travel papers.

On that road Jesus walked alongside him and in a dramatic fashion put him back on the correct path. His love for Saul was such that Jesus would not allow him to remain lost forever. The resurrected Jesus came back for Saul who would become known as St. Paul.

The Saul/Paul story often makes me wonder how often I, in my zeal, mistake my efforts for God's work when I'm really going in a very different direction. While I haven't had an encounter like the one he experienced on the road to Damascus there have been times when I've experienced a 'course correction' because Jesus came back for me. It is quite a humbling experience to have the one about whom thousand upon thousand angels sing come and spend time to correct my path. The revelation of the Lamb that was slain is a revelation of a God who cares about each and every sheep in his flock. I, like St. Paul, give thanks that Jesus came back for me.

The 11 remaining apostles seem to have gotten a bit lost as well. They had been visited twice by the risen Lord Jesus in the upper room but John mentions another time when Jesus appeared to them in a quite different way. The band of Jesus' followers had traveled to the Sea of Tiberias (also known as the Sea of Galilee) after those first two appearances in Jerusalem. This was familiar ground to them and it was probably where Simon/Peter had plied his fishing trade along with his brother and partners. There is a suggestion in the story told by St. John that Simon Peter was tempted to return to his former trade as a fisherman following the resurrection of Jesus. Now it may have simply been a way to spend some time in a familiar setting but I tend to think that Simon Peter was still a bit lost after the events of the crucifixion and resurrection. They had fished all night but caught nothing until Jesus urged them to throw their net on the other side of the boat. The large catch of fish reminded them all of another similar event and in his excitement Simon Peter jumped into the water to get to Jesus. If there was a chance that Simon Peter was going to simply return to the role of a fisherman Jesus' appearance on the shore of that familiar lake prevented it from happening. The miraculous catch of fish and a shore breakfast is followed by a beautiful scene of healing that takes place on that shore and a commissioning for the work which had been prepared for Simon Peter. Three times Peter denied knowing Jesus on the day of crucifixion and three times Jesus asked 'do you love me?'. Each assurance of his love for Jesus was met with a task for Simon Peter to complete. "Feed my lambs", "Tend my sheep", "Feed my sheep". A healing of hurts and a commissioning for service was what Jesus did on that lakeshore. A restoration of the path that God had placed them on was affirmed because Jesus came back.

The Resurrection of Jesus accomplishes and points to a great many wonderful things. It points

to God's tremendous love for humanity and God's commitment to see the plan of salvation through to its conclusion. It points to the fact that nothing, not sickness nor death, not loneliness nor sorrow, not misplaced zeal nor apathy will prevent the work of God from being accomplished. It also points to the wonderful news, at least in my experience, that all those who believe are somehow involved in the project that God is completing. The number of times that we are shown Jesus searching out and finding lost sheep is a testimony to that part of the Good News. This has happened, not only in those stories recorded in the New Testament, but has continued to happen throughout history. People like Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, Francis of Assisi, Benedict, John Newman, William Wilberforce, Desmond Tutu have been turned around and set right because Jesus came back for them. You and I live in a renewed and renewing society and are asked to open our hearts to a re-visit from the Lamb that was slain.

My prayer is that we will all experience some form of that visitation, perhaps the way the character Shasta did in C. S. Lewis' story, in the days and weeks to come.

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