

How did you come to relationship with the Risen Jesus?

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Easter 3C 2022 Acts 9:1 – 16, Rev 5:6 – 14, John 21:1 – 19

There once was a man who fell down a well, and, as he fell towards the inky-black, death-dealing water, he called out to the Risen Christ, “save me!” Miraculously, his overalls caught on a spike that was protruding from the well’s wall, his descent was arrested, and he was able to find other such spikes at strategic intervals, and to climb out. “Thank you, Jesus; I’ll always be your missionary!”, he exclaimed, and spent the rest of his life pushing people down wells.

Today’s three readings point to a different truth, because they show three *different* ways that particular people have come into relationship with the Risen Christ. Each of these different ways is seen to be a genuine path, and none may be played down as of less importance than others. Two of the stories are so familiar that we may not have noticed this significant thread running through them – Saint Paul’s Conversion, and the Restoration of Peter are rarely set next to one another – even on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. Then, the vision in Revelation 5 seems so removed from our realities that we can easily discount it altogether, but it too has a story to tell about relationship with the Risen Jesus.

Saint Paul’s relationship with the Risen Jesus is in this story one of “claiming”. Paul had been running around on the edge of Jesus’ community, harrying it. Perhaps he was seeing it as a threat to his established way of understanding life. In keeping with his “hands-on” approach to things, he held the

coats of the people who were stoning Stephen, he saw to the arrest and condemnation of those who were following what people at that time referred to as "The Way" and then even following them to foreign places in order to see that this global threat was being controlled, even destroyed. A relationship of a sort, but not calculated to bear much fruit for the Risen Jesus. So, on the road to Damascus, Jesus said to him, "You may not recognize me, but I am Jesus whom you are persecuting! I claim you for my own!" Does this story resonate with your own walk in faith? Has the Risen Lord placed a hand on you and said, "I claim you for my own!"? Certainly Saul of Tarsus, Saint Paul as he became, is not the only one down the ages who has experienced the Risen Jesus in this life-changing way.

Saint Peter's relationship with the Risen Jesus took a different path. He had become a leading figure in the community of Jesus' followers during his earthly ministry. He had been in the inner circle of three among the twelve known as apostles. But spectacularly he had lost that position, three times denying that he even knew Jesus, or had kept company with him. Deeply troubled, in the uncertain times which immediately followed news of the resurrection, he decided to "go fishing". Perhaps it was in case Peter might be going to follow in the footsteps of that other betrayer, and harm himself, his companions said, "We will come with you!" And Jesus, in that lovely story, alluding to Peter's three times denial, three times had Peter assert his continuing love for Jesus. Peter's story could be spoken of as "forgiving" or "restoring". Does that shed light on *your* relationship with the Risen One? Certainly there have been many others down the Christian ages, who have related to Jesus in this way.

Then, in the dream-like or even nightmare-like atmosphere of the reading from Revelation, there is a story of "worshipping". In this passage, there is a gathering around the throne. Now in the previous chapter this throne is

described as having one seated on it looking like jasper and carnelian and surrounded by a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Before this throne of God is placed the “lamb standing as though it had been slaughtered”. In the code language used in this document, carefully concealed from the authorities of the day, the slaughtered Lamb stands for the Risen Jesus, who sends out his Spirit in sevenfold form into the world. The “four living creatures” have traditionally been taken to refer to the four Gospel writers, and they have the form of a lion, an ox, a human, and an eagle – the usual symbols for Mark, Matthew, Luke and John.

Before these powerful symbols of the Divine Presence there seems to be happening a concealed pontifical High Mass – twenty-four described as “elders”, with golden mitres, multiple bowls of incense symbolising the prayers of the saints, a magnificent choir singing “Worthy is the Lamb”, and “Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever”. These are the representative worshippers, but they represent before God “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth”.

You notice how many references there are to what we are doing here this morning, with our more limited resources! The Gospel, the prayers, the singing, the words, the divine presence brought to us under different symbols. And we are invited into this worshipping to come into relationship with the Risen Jesus. I wonder how many have been drawn to Jesus by the experience of worship, with all that that represents?

How did you come into relationship with the Risen Jesus? Here are three ways set out – claiming, restoring, worshipping – and each is set out as a legitimate way of coming into this relationship.

But did you also notice that each of these ways comes with a commission. Saul is told, “Go into the city and you will be told what you are to do” – and we know that he was

subsequently “told”; told that he was to be the apostle, the one sent out, to the Gentile world. Peter is restored, with the three-fold commission, “Feed my lambs, Feed my sheep, Tend my sheep”, and as a leading figure in the early Church he proclaimed and lived the gospel and cared for the flock. The great catch of fish taken at Jesus’ direction, was to be a sign of the abundance that might follow that restoration. Even the worshippers in Revelation are encouraged to take this good news into a hostile world, as the sealed scrolls of the revealing of God’s purposes were to be opened by the Lamb.

The Risen Jesus calls each of us into relationship with himself, each in our own different ways. This relationship is to be enjoyed both for its own sake, and also at the same time as a commission to bring others to him – not expecting that these others will come to him in the same way that we have experienced, but in ways that are appropriate for them, and to be celebrated. Of the four Gospel writers, Matthew most clearly puts the connection between our own relationship with Jesus, and our mission towards others. Remember that he concludes his account of the Good news by having Jesus say, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”