

Sermon Notes – May 4, 2025
The Holy Gospel of St. John 21: 1-19
Peace Lutheran Church
“Jesus Invites Us Again and Again!”

Today's readings reminds us how trans-formative and restorative the call of Jesus is.

Although Paul (Saul) writes in his letters about his encounter with Jesus, the vivid story of Acts 9 is what most people remember. Many modern Western readers cannot fathom why Saul first persecuted followers of Jesus so violently, but religious ideologies remain a pervasive motivation for war, conflict, and oppression to this day. Despite the conventional language of conversion, Saul's experience is more accurately a reorientation or redirection, since he remained somewhat the same afterward: religiously zealous, passionate, and bold. He is just reoriented to an entirely new understanding of Jesus as Lord. That Saul sought out men *and women* (9: 2) implies how influential women were in early church communities and their leadership. Jesus' words to Saul reflects the deep connection Jesus has with His followers: taking issue with them means taking issue with Jesus. Despite the prevalent idea that Saul changed his name as part of this life-changing experience, it is not until four chapters later that he goes by “Paul” (13: 9). This name was at most a secondary name, more familiar to the predominantly Gentile audience among whom he went on to minister.

Revelation gives an expansive glimpse of all creation at worship in God's presence - the future hope of the faithful. Although some today think the vision of heaven as a place of unending worship sounds boring, the joy and elation in this vision suggests that such an assumption is narrow and foolish.

Although some think John 21 is a later addition to scripture writings (based especially on how 20: 29-30 ends), the chapter appears in all surviving manuscripts. Simon Peter proposes going fishing, which at some level symbolizes old life patterns. The same past patterns seem implied by the word “these” - though grammatically referring to fish - in Jesus' question: “Do you love me more than these?” (21: 15). The story serves to reinstate Peter to Jesus' service by a threefold pattern that parallels Peter's denial. The 153 (fish) has prompted abundant theories about its significance based upon ancient zoology, mathematics, allegory, and gem ateria. (For example, 153 is the sum of all numbers from 1 to 17.) While the number's significance remains a mystery, certainly it suggests abundance.

In his first two questions, Jesus uses one verb for love (*agapao*), but another verb in the third question (*phileo*) - the verb Peter consistently uses in responding.

Peter feels hurt, either because of the threefold repetition recalling his denial, or because Jesus has stopped asking the question using the verb *agapao*, which is often associated in scripture with divine-like love. In the latter case, the shift suggests: "Peter, I know you can't truly love me, so I'll stop asking." Whatever the reason Peter feels hurt, Jesus reiterates the call to "follow me" and nurture his flock. John 21: 18-19 envisions a fate for Peter that follows in Jesus' steps.