

Easter Week – Year B – April 15, 2009 - Homily
Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8
Susan E. Wilmot

Recently in our Sunday morning Bible study we've talked about several stories that we have read or heard about, or shared from our own lives about experiences that change people. These experiences are like a revelation to those who experience them. They often set us on completely new paths in our lives. These major events are like massive spiritual earthquakes. The landscape of our hearts and minds is radically changed. Everything that was familiar is either drastically relocated or lost. Our priorities change, and so does our perspective.

The Book of Acts, otherwise known as the Acts of the Apostles presents us with a very different picture of the Apostle Peter. Gone is the brash disciple who proclaimed the night before Jesus died that, "Even though all become deserters, I will not" (Mark 14:29). Gone are the tears of despair after denying Jesus three times. Somehow the Peter we meet in the Book of Acts is thoughtful and discerning, instead of being blunt and reactive. He is confident and eloquent of speech, not like the peasant fisherman from Galilee that we met when Jesus first called his disciples. In short, this is a very different Peter.

In the Scripture just before today's passage Peter has received a vision of what God considers "clean". He is not the only one who has received an important communiqué from God either. The centurion Cornelius has been visited by an angel, and told to send for Peter. Cornelius, of course, is a Gentile. Remembering that the first followers of Christ were all Jewish, the issue for Peter and the fledgling followers of The Way, is whether to accept Gentiles or not into the new community of faith in Christ, and under what terms. In the twenty-four hours Peter has had to reflect on the vision of all that God has made clean, he arrives to meet Cornelius, and delivers a remarkable homily.

Peter is as steady as the rock he is named for. Given all that has happened in the last little while in his life, we would wonder that he is still sane. Jesus is crucified, died and buried. Jesus is raised from the dead, and appears to Peter and the other disciples. Then Jesus is taken up to heaven, leaving the disciples to go on to Galilee and begin their work where Jesus left off. We all know what it means to be partial to something or someone. It means that we choose that something most often, if given a choice, or tend to favor the ones we are partial too. As I'm sure you know, that kind of partiality has sparked major strife and resentments in families. Now Peter boldly proclaims that, "God shows no partiality." Literally meaning that God does not look upon our faces. In God, there is no favoritism. God does not judge us by appearances, but by examining our hearts, such that, according to Peter's witness, in any nation, all who fear God and do what is right are acceptable to Him. Faith is no more, and certainly no less, than the desire to incline our hearts towards God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is Lord of all.

In his homily, Peter then goes on to tell us why he is so confident that Jesus is Lord of all, and how this message, the Good News, is spreading throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee. As we discovered through our Lenten observances, the message begins with repentance – or as Peter says, the baptism that John announced. Jesus is God's anointed. He does good works, healing many and teaching. He is crucified, but "God raised him on the third day". Jesus appears to many of the disciples after his resurrection. And Jesus has commanded Peter and all His followers to preach to the people. To share their testimony in witness to Jesus as our Savior, and the one who forgives all our sins. The stunning implications of Jesus' resurrection made Peter aware that this was not just an act of God on behalf of a few, as many Israelites might have believed, but God's gracious gift for the whole of creation. Christ's Lordship is not just relevant to a small group of people, but a

statement about God and what God has done for the whole world through Jesus Christ. The opening verses of the Book of Acts, speak of Jesus' ascension to heaven, and so Peter is speaking from that perspective. Jesus has ascended to reign with God in heaven. As creator and redeemer of the world, nothing can be outside of our Lord's jurisdiction.

This insightful look at Jesus' Lordship of all, and our discipleship in His name has transformed Peter and his life. Through his discipleship when Jesus was alive, and his witness of the resurrected Lord, Peter has been fully converted to The Way. Peter has also been transformed into a new being. The spiritual transformation is evident in his new way of being in the world as well. "Conversion is no repairing of the old building: but it takes all down and erects a new structure... [making] quite a new fabric, from the foundation to the top stone all new," says Joseph Alleine. This is evidently true of Peter, and all who are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus our Lord.

Penetrating the mystery of the resurrection has transformed millions of lives and will continue to do so. The message of the Good News is to be experienced, explored and reflected upon because Jesus lives and Jesus reigns! It is a continuous act of God's amazing grace in and for the sake of the world. As members of Christ's Body, you and I are an integral part of this life-changing event: as personal participants by faith in Christ; as members of Christ's family the Church; and within this community of faith. Like Peter, we are called to listen to the Holy Spirit directing our hearts and lives. Like Peter, we must be flexible in our expectations, learning to expect, and gracefully accept a drastic reorganization of our hearts and minds. Life in Christ is different, especially contrary to the world around us. Just as Peter has shown us, in Christ Jesus our Lord, our lives are now sharper and brighter, more intentional, prayerful, and discerning. And most of all in the knowledge of our forgiveness and the gift of eternal life, we are filled with love, joy and hope. You and I serve the Lord of all. He is our master, and we too are commanded to preach, teach and testify as witnesses to the Good News in and through our way of being in The Way.

Amen.