**BLOWHARD TO SUBSTANCE, JN. 21:15-19, ACTS 2:22-39, APR. 14/24**

 I mentioned that last week is commonly called “Low Sunday because attendance typically falls off in churches the week after Easter. People have received their “spiritual fix” & absent themselves, believing that the journey to the cross is finished. But the Sunday after Easter should rightly be referred to as “**Easter 2.0**”. So this morning I want to welcome to “Easter 3.0” because, really, every Sunday is resurrection Sunday. In fact, every day, since Jesus’ death & resurrection, is a new resurrection day—a day of new life in Christ Jesus.

I would like you to reflect on the various responses people have had to Jesus from the time He was crucified on the day we call “Good Friday”. Those responses were very surprising, amazing, really. Beginning with Mary Magdalene, Joanna & Mary the mother of James who hurried to the tomb on Easter morning to anoint Jesus’ body, where they encountered 2 men or angels. They asked the women the question of the ages: “**Why are you looking for the living among the dead?”** Jesus isn’t just a historical character who died—as great a life as that would have been. But no. Not at all! He is a living presence & He not only helps us to live our lives to-day, He enables us to love our lives. **He enables to live a life that is truly worth living**!

 In Luke, there’s the account of Cleopas & Simon on the road to **Emmaus** on that 1st Sunday afternoon. Jesus, unrecognized by the men, came up & walked along with them. Only when they invited Jesus to stay with them, given the late hour, did they recognize Him when He broke bread & gave thanks. Then He disappeared. **Do you recognize the times when Jesus** comes & joins you along your way? Or, Like Cleopas & Simon, do you nearly miss Him? He didn’t impose Himself on them. **Only when they asked** Him did He agree to stay with them. **Have you asked**

 **Jesus into your heart to stay with you?**

 **Then Jesus suddenly appeared,** 1st to the disciples without Thomas present & a week later with him. On His 1st appearance the disciples were of course shocked & frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost. **He told them not to be afraid**, asked for & ate some fish to prove He wasn’t a ghost. **That action alone makes the resurrection a reality. Jesus appeared to them the 2nd time** for the benefit of Thomas, who, **like many of us** said he wouldn’t believe Jesus was alive unless he saw it with his own eyes & put his finger into the holes in Jesus’ hands & side. Jesus obliged him this opportunity & Thomas responded in awe, as we all should with, “**My Lord & my God!”**

 **Above all else, Jesus came to change people’s lives**. You could **see the change in Thomas immediately, from skeptic to believer. Incredible change happened with/to others around the cross & beyond**. We saw the most unlikely change in people we never would have expected. **The 1 thief** on the cross who reprimanded the thief on the other side of Jesus for mocking Him, asked Jesus to remember him when He came to His Kingdom. Remarkably, remarkably, Jesus told the thief he would be with Him, this day, in Paradise. **What an example of God’s grace!**

 **The Roman centurion**, whose job it was to oversee the execution & who had seen & /or heard all the evidence against Jesus, nevertheless saw all of the evidence for Jesus—the response of nature (the darkened sun, the earthquake) Jesus’ compassion & concern for the very people who caused His death, asking for His Father to forgive them & His gentle demeanor throughout the ordeal. It led him to the unlikely declaration “Surely this man is the Son of God.”

 And how unlikely was it for Nicodemus, of “**You must be born again**” fame to bring

enough burial spices for a king & for Joseph of Arimathea to boldly ask Pilate for Jesus’ body & provide a tomb for Him, to step up & proclaim Jesus when they’d been afraid to do so before?

 T**he power of the cross began its work immediately**. **But initially, that didn’t look to be so much the case for the disciples**. When **Jesus returned to them for a 3rd time**, **they had returned to fishing**. And they were still catching nothing. **But Jesus was there to change them.** He’d bbq’ed some fish for them & had breakfast ready for them after that fruitless, or should I say fishless overnighter. And just to add to the intrigue, He told them to put their nets out on the right side of the boat. They then made an unbelievable catch of 153 fish, some of which they added to the breakfast. **Yes, Jesus came to change lives!** **Have you changed** because of His death & resurrection? **Just what are you fishing for in life?** Jesus is calling you to something new, something different & something very exciting! **Are you in? Or, are you desperately trying to recreate Jesus in your own image?**

 **Wait for it. Change is coming. Peter** must have had some pretty mixed emotions about seeing Jesus again. His last pre-death, pre-crucifixion encounter with Jesus couldn’t have been worse. He’d just finished telling Jesus, though the others might abandon Him, he, Peter, would die with/for Jesus if it came to that. Mere hours later, he denied even knowing Him, even calling down curses to add emphasis about him not knowing Jesus. Then, as far as we know, he wasn’t even around for the crucifixion. Ouch! The only disciple we know was there was John.

 **Yet Peter was still with the disciples on this morning**. So there must have been a strong sense of Peter’s leadership of the group, **even after his cowardly denial**. He was the 1 who **believed Mary’s** account & took off to the tomb, with John initially following but outrunning old or less fit Pete. And now, as Jesus cooked breakfast, once again, **impulsive impetuous** Peter jumps out of the boat before it’s even at shore & is the1st to connect with Jesus. But there’s still an **awkward gap**. They know it’s Jesus, but it doesn’t look like Him & they’re too embarrassed to ask. **Sometimes we miss this part. Jesus also took bread & gave it to them**. This reunion was no less than **a Communion**. **Jesus is at the “table” & He’s the 1 who’s prepared the table**.

 But the **toughest part isn’t over yet for Peter. Jesus goes 1 on 1 with him**. “Peter, do you love Me more than these? These what? Maybe the things Peter was distracted by—the fishing & all its accompanying paraphernalia, maybe **more than he loves the other disciples**. That’s **an interesting & hard question. How much do you love the loved ones in your life?** A lot, right? And that’s an understatement. You love them with all your heart. **But do you love Jesus more? More than anyone, more than anything? Let the question sink deep into your soul.**

 Peter answers, “Yes, Lord, you know.” “Feed My lambs.” The same question comes back a 2nd time. Same answer. Not enough. Same question a **3rd time. This time, Jesus gets to the soul of Peter & Peter is hurt. Just think about your loved one asking you 3 times if you really love them**. That would really cut deeply. **Sometimes, Jesus needs to do some deep surgery on our hearts**. He is, after all, the great surgeon. But don’t miss this. Each time Jesus commissioned him. He gave Peter a very important assignment. “Feed my sheep.”

 Beloved, **listen** very carefully for God’s voice when you’re hurting deeply. Sometimes He needs to get through the resistance, the pride or denial to get to the real you, the you He wants to change. And **once He gets there, it’s straightforward. “Follow Me.” Are you following Him?**

 **More than anything, Jesus came to change lives. He wasn’t finished with Peter**. Peter

had denied Jesus 3 X. Jesus reinstates Peter 3 X. So what happened next? Well, Acts gives us the chronological unfolding of that question. Peter not only remains among the disciples but he’s their defacto leader. In the 2nd chapter of Acts he addresses a crowd at Pentecost & sets them all straight with this powerful proclamation: “**Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord & Christ.”** When the people heard this they were cut to the heart—sound familiar? Peter had just been cut to the heart by Jesus—heart surgery-& said, “What shall we do?” Have you ever asked Jesus that question from the heart?

Peter’s answer nails it. “**Repent & be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins**. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you & for your children, & for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

In case you missed it, that’s a foundational verse for why infants are baptized. It’s perfectly biblical to do so. There are other supporting verses as well, but that’s a critical 1.

 So what’s the outcome? **Peter the denier becomes Peter the Christ-follower.** The blowhard, the guy who’s quick to speak but sometimes slow to catch the real significance, b-comes a man of substance. He’s changed: Christ’s heart surgery has cut deep, caught his attention & changed him to really follow Jesus rather than just talk about it. He’s now walking the walk.

 Clearly, the question for you & me is, “**Are you walking the walk**? Or are you just talking the talk—going through the motions? **It’s easy to look spiritual**. **It’s another thing to dig down in the trenches & get into the mud**. Or, to get back to the fishing analogy, what are you fishing for in life? If it’s Jesus’ fish, we’d better smell fishy. Welcome to the fish market. May our lives attract (not bait) fish for Jesus. **What do you need to change so that can happen?** We’ll look at Peter again next week & see how he did that. Amen.