

Acts of the Apostles: 4:1-12
Psalm 118
John 21:1-14
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Friday in the Octave of Easter

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One of the most telling lines in the Gospel of John is when Jesus says to Peter at the washing of feet: “You do not know what I am doing now but afterward you will understand.”

It is somewhat repeated again that same night in the upper room when Peter insists that he will follow Jesus, and even lay down his life for him. “You cannot follow me now, but you will afterwards.”

Today’s appearance text is the “afterwards.” It takes place on the shore of where Peter often fished and it is the scene of a charcoal fire. Peter has moved from the darkness of night to the morning light.

Just as we learn of the exterior growth of Peter from his compulsive, emotional, dramatic outbursts in the Gospel texts to now in the Acts of the Apostles to speaking boldly to crowds of his conviction, his belief in Jesus as Messiah — and just as we find in one of his later letters that we must proclaim the mighty works of him who has called us from darkness into his wonderful light, we know with Peter (and maybe with us as well), this change didn’t happen all at once.

There were some stages, some glimmers of light along the way. The exterior conviction and bold speech could only happen because of interior growth.

We can trace some of this in the Gospel of John.

Today’s text may jog our memories of him in the earlier stages that will bring him to the dawn of this day. Even some of the images are repeated. We will name a few.

In an earlier encounter with Jesus, there was an abundant catch of fish and Peter was astounded. Did he understand what he was called to do — to be fishers of people? That he was to join Jesus’ mission? Not yet.

Then the hillside with thousands of hungry people and little food. Jesus’ instructions to feed them. Then the miracle of the loaves and the fishes.

Later, Jesus’ graphic words saying he is the Bread of Life. It causes complaints and arguments and for some listeners a turning away. It is Peter who answers the hurtful question of Jesus. “Lord, to whom else shall we go?”

Throughout this Gospel, Jesus searches out Peter's mind and heart. He will not always find the way. The painful remarks of not understanding yet. The show of violence in the garden, the humiliating failures of denial in the courtyard, the abandonment of Jesus in the darkest hour. Can these experiences be resolved?

Now this fishing trip. Here it is morning, and Jesus calls out the obvious: they have no fish. That is, until they follow the familiar instructions of Jesus. Then abundance. An understanding now.

At the shore Peter finds a charcoal fire, perhaps a haunting image for him. This time is different. He is not here to hide in the dark, he comes instead to be fed by Jesus who prepares the fish.

Peter is now face to face with the one who calls him from darkness to light. He knows who it is. It is a new day.

We know well the later section of this text and the triple declaration of Love. Peter's growing consciousness has brought him to the Light.

What of us?

We are in the midst of a sort of afterwards as we take on our congregational project of Exploration into Spirituality.

Taking some intentional time to think over our individual history in family, school, community illuminates some major movements of God in our lives. At the beginning of the process, we were to consider: What is the gift in this process?

Certainly, a major gift is illumination. The unfolding in our memories of those occasional glimmers in our past shine in fuller ways today. A detail, a chance encounter, a word out of the blue we realize now gave us an entirely new outlook. An unexpected call, a change in ministry, a new direction opens up.

Unlocking experiences that at one time seemed incidental or bewildering or regretful, we now see as steps in our understanding and growth in union with the One who calls us. We read the signs of our history with new wisdom; we address our hopes and concerns with new vitality.

In our "afterward," it is our faith in Jesus that turns so many aspects of our life into cornerstones for our future, the source of our greatest joy, the roots of our eternal happiness.