

Easter 3 (C)  
April 18, 2010  
Text: John 21:1-19

Pastor Aaron J. Couch  
First Immanuel Lutheran Church  
Portland, Oregon

When I was in high school, a bunch of friends and I put on a talent show at church. It was a huge effort, but what I remember is how much fun it was. There was no single “star.” Instead, everyone did whatever they wanted to try, offering whatever talent they had (or maybe, “thought they had”). We had singing. We had magic tricks. I tried my hand at being a stand-up comic. I can’t for the life of me remember any of the jokes I told—which is probably just as well. But at least people laughed politely. A couple of friends did a skit that wound up involving pie pans full of shaving cream—and it really was funny.

One of the things that made it so much fun was being a part of a bigger effort, being part of everybody pitching in to make it happen. Everyone shared the work of setting up the stage and practicing hard and supporting each other. It really felt like we were all in it together. Nobody was playing the role of the diva. Nobody had to be the center of everything. It was a blast.

I’d like to invite you to think about being God’s person in the world as being a bit like taking part in a talent show. The whole purpose of the show is to make God’s love come alive in the world—with whatever talents and abilities you’ve got. You’re not a spectator in the crowd. You’re up on stage (or at least working behind the scenes), because Jesus is sharing his work with us, so that every one of us has the chance to be part of the bigger effort, something beautiful and true and life-giving.

That’s sort of like how it was for Peter in our Gospel story for today. This story comes after the last week of Jesus’ ministry in Jerusalem; after the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples, when he told them that he would be betrayed by one of his own, arrested and condemned by the religious authorities, and put to death. Peter had insisted he’d be loyal to the end. He said he’d stand by Jesus no matter what. But it all happened just like Jesus said it would. Judas betrayed Jesus, and all the other disciples fled—although Peter did follow into the courtyard of the high priest’s house to watch as Jesus was interrogated and abused.

It was there in the courtyard that everything fell apart for Peter. He was warming himself by a charcoal fire, trying to be brave. But he ended up denying three times that he even knew Jesus. And then, in shame and grief, he fled. And in our gospel story Peter was back in Galilee, trying to pick up his old life as a fisherman. It wasn’t going too well. He and his friends had been working all night, but hadn’t caught a thing. A mysterious stranger called

from the beach, “Children, you haven’t caught anything, have you? Try throwing the net out on the other side of the boat.”

I can imagine Peter thinking, “Yeah, like that’ll work.” But it did, and suddenly the net was full of fish. There are so many they needed help to haul in the net. And someone said, “It’s Jesus!” By the time Peter got to shore, Jesus was already cooking fish over a charcoal fire. Jesus’ conversation with Peter was very gentle. He asked Peter the one thing that matters—“Peter, do you love me?” There by the charcoal fire, Jesus asked Peter three times—once for each time Peter denied he even knew Jesus—three times to remember, but also to move beyond those denials, to set them aside so that Peter could begin again. Jesus was doing more than forgiving Peter. This conversation is also about healing—to heal Peter’s spirit, so he can be a whole person again. It’s also about healing because Jesus sees a bigger purpose for Peter’s life. Feed my sheep. Care for my people. Jesus wants to share his work with Peter so that Peter can play the part he was meant to play in the unfolding of God’s work of love for the whole world.

I wonder what bigger purpose Jesus sees for your life, what part you’re meant to play in all that God wants to do to transform and heal this world. Whatever that bigger purpose might be, it grows out of the same two realities that are here in the story about Peter. The bigger purpose in our life grows out of Jesus’ forgiving, healing care for us, and out of our love for Jesus. It doesn’t matter what sort of failures or messes have been part of our lives in the past. None of that is able to be an obstacle to Jesus welcoming us into a new life. And Jesus doesn’t just say to us, “Oh, yeah, you’re forgiven.” He gives himself to us to heal us and make us whole. He meets us in the water of baptism, in the bread and wine of communion, to touch our lives, to assure us that we belong to him completely, that we are his beloved. Jesus meets us in prayer and worship to touch our hearts with his peace, to make us his new creation, to welcome us into the life we were meant to have.

And for our part, receiving that life is all part of loving Jesus, of being caught up in his love for us and responding in love and gratitude to him. “Do you love me?” “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” And in that love, we enter into the true purpose of our lives, to be part of God’s great work of love for the world. Whatever talents, whatever abilities you have, Jesus wants you to devote them to his work of loving, forgiving, healing the world. So like Peter, redeemed and restored, we reflect—what abilities do we have that help us feed God sheep, care for God’s beloved people.

It’s almost like the whole wide world is God’s talent show. At times it might seem a bit like a circus, but then so did that talent show I was part of in high school. In God’s talent show, every one of us has a part to play. Every one of us

has talents that can serve God's great purposes for making this world whole, because every one of us has ways we can meet needs and nurture others, and overcome divisions, and make this world a more welcoming and caring place. Jesus is calling you to use everything you've got to make God's love come alive. Thanks be to God. Amen