

Easter 3C
Peace, Seattle
April 10, 2016
Acts 9:1-20, John 21:1-19

ARE YOU ALL IN?

It was April at Holden Village and spring was coming on fast.

Warmer days accelerated the melting snow; trails were opening up; skis were being stored away; crews were converting the lodges for summer—everyone was gearing up to welcome guests after the long, snowbound winter.

May was just around the corner and that meant one thing: the May Youth Weekends, when scores of high schoolers and youth leaders from all over the Northwest would journey uplake to Holden for a weekend packed with learning, fellowship, and fun.

Now, the reality for the Villagers, who'd spent the winter in semi-hibernation, was that their community of 70 would swell to 370 in the blink of an eye!

So it was that each year, May was greeted with a mixture of anticipation and trepidation as we braced ourselves for the energy rush that accompanied the arrival of 300 high school kids and counselors.

As it happened, the 3rd Sunday of Easter fell on the first weekend of May that year, and the Village Pastor's sermon was based on verse 7 of our gospel:

When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea.

That's right, the topic was FISHING NAKED!

(...As if 300 adrenalin-charged youth needed encouragement in that direction!)

The point of the sermon, finally (I think) was a question: ARE YOU ALL IN?

- Are you ready to follow Jesus even if it means taking risks?
- Are you ready to trust him even if trusting means leaving the safety of what you know and going through uncharted waters to get there?

Music from South Africa shaped our liturgy that Sunday in the Village Center, and I'll forever carry with me the image of 300 young people, arms on shoulders, jumping in rhythm to the drums, like a band of Masai warriors. **They were ALL IN!**

Saul was ALL IN. When we first meet him in the book of Acts he's a young firebrand who has crystal clarity about the new Jewish sect called PEOPLE OF THE WAY.

His verdict? THEY GOT TO GO.

- It was he who was a legitimizer at the trial of Stephen—the first Christian martyr.
- It was he who volunteered as coat-checker for the men who stripped down to stone Stephen.
- And it was he who—when the Jesus movement spilled out from Jerusalem—opposed it with every fiber of his being, using every means at his disposal to contain and destroy it.
- This was his mission. And intimidation and violence were his tools.

No one could question whether HE, Saul, was ALL IN.

Subpoenas in hand, he was headed for Damascus to arrest and imprison more followers of Jesus when his mission was brought to a sudden, screeching halt.

A blinding light sent him crashing to the ground...
and the Voice that followed signaled the end of life as he knew it.

He was a man willing to do whatever was required to serve his truth.
But when the Risen One met him on that road, his plans, his reasons, his methods crumbled.
And through a descent into blindness, he finally began to see.

It's a powerful story; a story that shaped the life of the fledgling church then, and continues to shape it today. Yet the person I most admire in this story is not Saul but Ananias.

- It is Ananias who Saul was coming to arrest and drag off to Jerusalem.
- It is Ananias and his community on whom Saul would bring the hammer down.
- It is Ananias to whom the risen Lord speaks, saying—GO MEET SAUL OF TARSUS.
- And it is Ananias who, in spite of knowing Saul's reputation as a persecutor of the church, HEEDS Christ's word,
GOES to meet Saul,
CALLS HIM BROTHER,
RESTORES HIS SIGHT,
WASHES him in the waters of baptism
and WELCOMES him into a new community and a way of being in the world without violence.

That's right, Ananias is ALL IN.

The conversion Christ works in Saul through the ministry of Ananias is so total—his name must change and it does—from SAUL to PAUL.

And it isn't long before it becomes apparent that Paul, too, is ALL IN... ALL IN on serving the Truth that met him on the road – the Truth who is also the Way and the Life.

No longer a man of violence, Paul becomes an ambassador of reconciliation and a witness to the power and hope of the resurrection. It is a testimony for which he, finally, gave his life.

Lien Douglas! What powerful stories attend your baptism this day! And what ventures await you! We don't know where your life will take you, or how it will unfold, but we know the HOPE we hold for you...that you, too, will be grasped by him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

And our hope is more than hope—it is a promise—that through these waters you will come to know the One who is ALL IN on loving you! ALL IN on blessing you! ALL IN on being your companion all the way through the alley!

Mingled with the water from the Cascade Mountains that will fill this font today is water that your mom, Kjersta, brought from Alaska's Kenai River, from the land where her life of faith took root...

And water, too, from a creek near Salem, which is where your dad, Dustin first came to know what being grafted into the body of Christ is about.

Fused in, with, and under these waters is God's indelible promise that through these waters the love and nurture and acceptance you already know from your mom and dad, your grandparents, aunts and uncles, will expand outward to this whole community and beyond.

Yes, little Lien, in these waters you meet a community that is ALL IN for you!

And you become, like us, a little fish reborn in these waters; a little fish forever bound to Christ's death and resurrection; forever grafted into Christ the Vine, forever clothed in Christ's forgiveness and new life.

The sweater Lien is wearing, from great-grandma Edie, and the blanket that enfolds him, from great-grandma Pearl, remind us how closely we are bound to the legacy of our families—and there is so much to celebrate in that!

At the same time, we know that not every legacy we receive brings joy to our lives. For in spite of being claimed and named children of God in this sacrament, we still belong to a broken human family.

But through the power of the resurrection, even things that are utterly and devastatingly broken can be made whole; and the very thing which, we're convinced, separates us from God, can become transformed—through the Risen Jesus—into a channel of mercy.

That's how it was with Peter.

At the end of today's story, after he's put his clothes on and swum to shore; after he's eaten the breakfast Jesus has prepared, Peter's given the opportunity to confess his love again; and that very act brings forgiveness and restoration.

Still, the Risen Jesus doesn't leave things there. Even forgiveness, as important and powerful and indispensable as it is, is not the end of the story. There is something more going on.

PETER, DO YOU LOVE ME? Yes Lord, you know I love you.
FEED MY SHEEP.

Following in the footsteps of the Risen Lord means being his presence in the world. Wading in the water turns into God's work, our hands.

It starts at the Font, moves to the Table, and flows out beyond these walls into the world, in a constant rhythm that keeps us coming back and going out, again and again and again.

This is what it means to be children of promise, this is what it means to wade in the water.

Amen.