

SERMON | THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 9:1–20, Revelation 5:11-14, John 21:1-19 | Barnabas Pusunur | St. Paul & the Redeemer | May 1, 2022

Would you like to see God? Maybe some of us living in this modern world would answer 'why?'. "Why would I want to see God?" But seeking an appearance or a vision of God is an idea that is very strong in many world religions. People long for an appearance of God. It is believed an appearance of God is the pinnacle of religious experience. Many mystical expressions of faith have earnestly sought this appearance. When God appears then there is a disruption. A disruption in the present and a new & better way is opened.

But if God appears, how does he look like when he appears. What would the first disciples of Jesus who believed that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, what would they have expected to see if Jesus appeared to them? If they were convinced by the testimony of others that Jesus had conquered death– the one thing that no person has conquered no matter how strong, rich, or famous. What would Jesus look like after this conquest? Would he appear in glorious power, with majesty shining around him? That's a reasonable expectation.

But Jesus had already defied all expectations. Even before his trial and death, while Jesus was getting more and more famous with all his powerful miracles and teachings, they had expected him to wield some kind of power and become a king. But as we know Jesus had his own plans. The way to bring about deliverance and wholeness was not through a sword or an exercise of power to dominate others. Jesus brought about salvation through the way of the cross. He taught his

followers about a life of humility and service to others. A life of love.

If Jesus had defied expectations before, he would defy them again. If they were expecting a display of power when the resurrected Jesus appeared then they were going to be disappointed. In the early morning hours of one ordinary day, Jesus appeared to some fisherman. This resurrected Jesus shouts out from land. Listen to the mundane nature of the conversation: "Children, you have no fish, have you?" "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." "Come and have breakfast." By then they had recognized that this man on land was their resurrected Lord. He had just invited them: "Come and have breakfast." I wish that's how Jesus appears to me. "Come and have breakfast." The appearance of Jesus showed that he cared for them. As they finish breakfast, Jesus tells Peter, the new way of life was all about love. Peter, if you love me, then love and take care of others. The way of Christ is all about loving God and loving your neighbor.

Years later, when a leader of the church, called John, was sent into exile on an island, he saw a vision in which Jesus appeared. In the account described in the book of Revelation, this Jesus appeared as a Lamb. As a lamb that looked slaughtered. Among all the glory of heaven, among a royal court filled with majesty, there appeared a Lamb. A lamb is not known for its ferocity or strength. In this appearance Jesus is seen as a lamb. Jesus appears in meekness and humility.

Jesus was the sacrifice to reconcile the world to each other and to God.

The way of Jesus is very different from our expectation of a king. But in the vision John saw, all the angels and the creatures of heaven and the entire cosmos, sang praises to this Lamb. It was as if the entire cosmos was shouting that this is what true majesty is. This is what true power looks like. Because this is what the power of love is. Love wins as a lamb. Not by domination but by service.

When Paul, who was also called Saul, was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians he was driven by a passion for God. He thought that this group of people were defiling and blaspheming the true faith. They were luring people into a wrong way. In his passion for God, he went about defending his conception of God. Going house to house, pulling out these Christians, arresting them, and even approving of them being thrown to mob violence and murdered. It was a very difficult time for Christians in and around Jerusalem, when the religious authorities and religiously zealous people thought they ought to preserve the honor of God at all costs.

On the road to Damascus, a bright light flashed around Paul. He fell to the ground and the light blinded him. A voice from the light said "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Jesus had appeared to Paul at that moment in the flashing of that light & in the voice. But again, Jesus did not appear as one roaring vengeance on Paul for what he did to his followers. Jesus appeared as one who was being persecuted. "Saul, why do you persecute me?" In persecuting Christians, Paul had been persecuting

Jesus. Jesus had appeared to Paul as a one who was persecuted. As one who was harassed. As one who was dragged out of his house. As one who was arrested. And as one who was killed by violent mobs.

Paul must have never in his wildest imagination thought that if God was to appear to him, he would appear as a persecuted one. This appearance of Jesus disrupted everything he had thought about God. God was not about domination but about one who identified with those who suffered. Paul's whole conception of God was turned on its head.

Subsequently, Paul was prayed for by other Christian leaders, and he realized the folly of his ways, and then he was baptized. In his baptism he joined these people whose God was this God of love and service.

This morning, we will/have witness(ed) a baptism. We will see/saw Lola joining a people whose God is all about love. Lola in her baptism is in fact sharing in the death and in the resurrection of Jesus, that is she is sharing in that perfect example of love-Jesus. Lola in her baptism is sharing and being part of that family which knows that love is the way of God. The scripture declares that this family, this people of God, is the body of Christ. This morning Jesus again appears. Jesus appears as this body of Christ-- the church. Jesus appears through the sacrament of Baptism. Jesus appears in his sacrificial love in the Eucharist.

Would you like to see God? Well now we know what to expect. Jesus will always appear as love and grace. Always! Amen.