

Third Sunday of Easter 2016—Year C
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI
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Two of my dearest friends have a long-standing, shared obsession with online videos. You know, those videos of kittens snuggling with pit bulls, or kids doing flips off roofs onto trampolines or whatnot. Procrastination bait, essentially. They are particularly fond of the videos of soldiers coming home from tour early and surprising dogs or children and the generous tears that follow. I generally ignore these two minute marvels, but I will admit that one recently drew a tear from my dry, dry eyes. In this particular video, a little 4 month old baby with an eye condition, gets a special set of glasses that allows him see his mom for the first time. And the look on his face was unrefined joy. His life, from that moment on, could not be the same. The first glance of his mother's face altered every single following experience for the rest of his time on earth. And he could not stop smiling. And I will admit to misting up a little.

In our reading this morning from the Acts of the Apostles, we meet Ananias--an early Christian disciple living in Syria shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Ananias lives his life faithful to God and committed to the early church. God comes to Ananias in a vision and says this (paraphrased): "Ananias, there is a man named Saul currently afflicted with an ailment of the eyes, and I, the Lord God, want you to go and heal him in my name. Here is the catch: the man I want you to heal, Saul, is a notorious persecutor of Christians and is unmatched in his zeal to have all the followers of Jesus imprisoned or killed. Yes, Ananias, THAT guy. That's the guy I want you to go heal."

Ananias is understandably reluctant to find and heal Saul, but the Lord is insistent, and Ananias is obedient. Ananias heals Saul's eyes, and Saul repents, is baptized and goes on to become the most prolific Apostle in the early church, basically and single-handedly spreading the stories of Jesus to every corner of the Mediterranean. After his eyes were healed, Saul's entire life changed, and no moment afterward could be the same. Saul later changed his name; you might know him better as St. Paul.

My question is this: at that moment, right when the veil is lifted, right when the scales fell from Saul's eyes. At that moment when Ananias, servant of God, comes to Saul and grants him his sight. At that moment: what did Saul see?

That MUST be the question of the hour, because whatever it is he saw is the thing that caused him to request Baptism and to give his entire life to founding churches. Whatever he saw caused him to turn his life from the zealous persecution of the early Christians and compelled him to become the founder of an international, inter-linguistic, global religion.

(As an aside, I realize that St. Paul had some real unsavory qualities, which I regularly preach against, but to give due credit, the man knew how to plant a church.)

What did Saul see? I'm thinking it must have been pretty good. The text doesn't say, but I have a guess.

I wonder if Saul saw a glimpse of heaven; saw a glimpse of the kingdom of God as it ought to be.

I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice,

**"Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!"**

What if, Saul, upon being healed by the wise and faithful Ananias, saw a Lamb seated on a throne, and people in white, singing praises of glory and honor, just like we heard about in our reading from Revelation? What if Saul, changed his entire life because of a vision of a baby sheep?

I think this is possible. A sheep on a throne can change all of our lives. Because that Lamb on that throne tells us something about the nature of God. And it is something so deeply radical, that we can't help but have our lives transformed by the truth of it. The Lamb on the throne tells us that God is the God of regular things. That God is the God of the vulnerable. God is the God of the orphan sheep that needs care. God is the God of those places in the world that require love, peace, compassion. Our God on the throne is no king. Is no queen. Is no CEO. Is no priest, for that matter. Is no general or admiral or any other kind of powerful figure that the world dreams up and calls "power." God's power is the power of the Lamb. And that is the very revelation that Saul received that moment the scales fell from his eyes. His life could not remain the same. Our lives cannot remain the same.

Ponder the Lamb on the throne this week. Think about how the revelation of God's nature might change your life. Consider what you know about the powers in the world and then entertain the idea that you might be wrong.

God is worthy of honor and praise, yes. And God's throne in heaven gathers the faithful from all generation, yes. But the power of God is not the same as the power of the world. It is infinitely more just, more loving, more vulnerable. And understanding that bit of good news changed Saul's life, changes our lives.

Whenever we walk arm in arm, peacefully, to right an injustice in our world, we are worshipping the Lamb of God. Whenever we feed the hungry, tend the sick, accompany new parents, meet a basic need in the world, we are worshipping the Lamb of God. And whenever we join together to deny domination, corruption and avarice, we are worshipping the Lamb of God. The scales have fallen from our eyes, and we can see just fine. We can see God's world as it should be, and life will never be the same. Amen.