

Years ago, after presenting Bibles to 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, the Teacher asked students to open them to the story of Saul's conversion. And one student said, "It is not here". The teacher said, remember there are 2 parts: the Hebrew Bible and the New. And in the New Testament there are the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, then Letters, but in between these, is the Book of the Acts of the Apostles & early Church. And the girl said, "But my Bible is missing the Acts". Sure enough in the binding of her Bible, the Publisher had omitted the Book of Acts. What would it mean to have all the Bible and the Gospels and Epistles, but no Book of Acts? Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Jesus would have come, he died on the Cross, was buried and on Easter morning the tomb would be empty. But the Resurrection coming to each of us, the Holy Spirit, the struggles of the Church, would never have been.

The Earliest Christians did not have the Creeds, Confessions, Gospels or Letters. ALL that they were Certain of was Jesus Died on the Cross for us. Growing up in Presbyterian Churches in the 1950s and 60s, we had Potlucks, Disney Movies, Choir Rehearsals, Sunday School, Meetings and VBS; but in the Good O Days: On Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Ascension Day: No Worship! What that means is we celebrated Jesus Entry Palm Sunday, and Resurrection Easter BUT he never died! We had an Empty Cross and knew not Why(?) LOSS is Essential, Death is needed for Resurrection. Without the Crucifixion, there was no death, betrayal, atonement, shame, questioning or doubt,... there is only Hosanna raised to greater crescendo of Alleluia! Without stopping in Silence, to wonder what it means.

WE have witnessed enough MASH, ER, Gray's Anatomy, Chicago Med, 911 Hospital Shows to know a person does not quietly open their eyes after death! After strangulation's death on the cross, they lowered his body with the cross beam, they drove the Nails all the way through to release his limbs. They wiped down the sweat and blood, then buried the corpse for decay in Earth's stone womb. After the shame, the pains, the Death, 3 long nights and days of "Lifeless Nothing" ... THEN the sudden rush of blood in his heart and veins, the rush of oxygen in his lungs, the thoughts and realizations in his brain! The first Easter was GOD Raising Up Jesus from death - life. The 2nd Easter came in the Upper Room, where he shared Communion with them, and again a week later when they were all together. Each had violated Communion. Judas sold him out, Peter denied 3 times, All ran away. Like God at Adam's Creation, Jesus breathed on them saying "Peace, Be Still!" "Be not faithless, BELIEVE!"

Now weeks after, routines have had to change because Jesus died on the cross. The ancient practice of "Mourning" was a practice continued a long time, in order that you could experience all the circumstances, seasons and relationships of life; first with that one, Lost : Dead, and 2<sup>nd</sup> in order to figure out how to go on. Simon Peter said he was going fishing. This was the most normal of things for who they had been BEFORE Jesus. Jesus was done, their reason for doing something other, was done. May as well return to what we know. But at night, out on the water, things happen, accidents, the black of night merges with blackness of the water. The others were worried Peter might take his own life, so acted to go along with him. BUT All nightlong The Fishermen could catch nothing.

Have you ever noticed, that when you are in a bad mood, even the most routine things, especially creative acts, ALL go wrong. I have learned that when I have had a bad day, I turn the cooking over to others, because anything I touch is going to burn. The disciples were pre-occupied with loss, sadness, and that depression kept them from any joy, any accomplishment. Before they could go back or go on, first they had to resolve and reconcile what they done, what they lost and why.

At sunrise, they saw a figure on the shore, Asking if they caught anything? When he told them **“to cast their nets on the other side”**, one disciple recognized Jesus said this before. AND PETER PUT ON CLOTHES BEFORE JUMPING INTO THE WATER! Have you ever tried to swim in clothes? Especially Robes and shoes? They become saturated, drag us down into the abyss, the waters of chaos. Over and over again throughout the Scriptures, Adam and Eve’s fig-clothes, Joseph and the Coat of colors, The Father of the 2 Sons running to greet him, the Prodigal being given a robe; CLOTHES REPRESENT HUMAN POWER & CLASS, they cover our nakedness, our humanity, and in LIFE our hiding weighs us down. I believe putting clothes on to jump into the water, was to say that Peter like Adam & Eve in the Garden covered his nakedness, hiding his mortality, his shame before the Lord. Yet all cover-ups do is add weight, our hiding our selves pulls us toward death.

Simon Peter comes ashore with Jesus, to warm himself by the fire. The Radiating Warmth, the smell of wood smoke, were sensual reminders of Peter’s dark night of 3 denials.

We lose a great deal in translation, because in English we have rendered each of Jesus’ questions the same “Do you love me?” But Greek of the New Testament had many different words for the many meanings of LOVE, in particular “UTI” “FRUI” and “AGAPE”. UTI is where in English we derive the word **“UTILITARIAN”** meaning “for a purpose”. We LOVE Money because of its purchasing power, and our use of that value to buy and to sell. Few of us like the smell of sweaty coins, or the feel of bills, the touch of money feels dirty; THE LOVE IS IN USE.

FRUI is the root of **“Fruitful”** to give you overwhelming joy from experience.

I love Ice Cream, the only thing I love more is Chocolate. The smell of it, the taste, gooeyness, transport me to childhood. Fruitful Love is about the Experience.

**AGAPE** is being One with others, a reciprocal part of the body, where I get pleasure by relationship, trusting openly with you and with God without reserve.

Jesus’ questioning of Peter is repetition of Peter’s 3 fold denial, and ever deeper, replacing peeled layers of an onion, “Do you Love me, *derive value from faith?*”

Do you love me, “find joy and fruitfulness in what we learn from one another?”

Do you Love me, “wanting to be part of One Communion, One Body, together?”

In the Reformed Tradition, Sin is separation, from God, from the world, ourselves.

“Do you want to be one with God and one with this communion for Ever, or do you want to be isolated, alone and separate, reliving the past?”

We have lost the connection between Confession & Communion. Confession & Forgiveness were SO THAT when sharing Communion, our self could be shared with

others and with God, without restraint, without hiding, without infecting others with our sins.

Over the last 35 years as an Ordained Presbyterian Minister, over 60 years of life, Never have I seen clouds part to hear a voice, but there have been many times, when I can only describe God gave me words and conviction to act, where I never would have chosen to do so on my own. Can you imagine the faith and commitment of that Disciple, Ananias? Who went as instructed to hear the Confession and teach Catechism to Saul, who baptized Saul to be Paul so as to share communion with him... knowing all the while that Saul had warrants to arrest and have killed anyone belonging to the Way?

The 1<sup>st</sup> Easter was when God raised Jesus from death to life.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> was when Jesus shared his wounds and his spirit breathing on his disciples to not be faithless but Believe.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Resurrection, came to Simon Peter, and to Saul who was Baptized Paul, and Each of US, as we confess our sins and choose to love by being in Communion.

John Calvin had a different understanding of Communion than other Reformers.

The Catholic Church practiced Transubstantiation, believing the Priest altered the substance of Elements from Bread into Flesh, from Wine into Blood.

Martin Luther believed in ConSubstantiation, that the elements did not change, but the Priest commanded Jesus to come Down out of Heaven.

Swiss Reformer: Zwingli believed this was about Remembrance of what Jesus did.

Calvin believed When there is brokenness between us, there is hurt and division.

When we Forgive, we are stronger than ever before, so in Communion we are forgiven and we are forgive others, forgiven by God, and even forgive ourselves.