

**Sermon Notes** May 5, 2019

**Focus** Peter and Paul's orthopraxis and orthodoxy

**Lectionary Readings**

[http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC\\_RCL/Easter/CEaster3\\_RCL.html](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Easter/CEaster3_RCL.html)

There is an interesting pairing of Peter and Paul in the readings that I had not noticed until now.

**Paul**

Paul keeps the faith pure by murdering Christians. He thinks he's a really good guy. It never entered his mind that he might be a Marvel comics villain. He thinks of himself as a champion of the 'true' faith by rooting out good Jews gone bad - this could be done bounty hunter style by bringing early Christians bound to Jerusalem, or by simply killing them. These first Christians were "bad" because they were followers of "The Jesus Way". It is only through Jesus' intervention in blinding Paul on the road that Paul even begins to understand that terrorizing these people was not the right thing to do.

**Acts 9** *The intervention*

Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

We are not as extreme as Paul.

If we begin to categorize others as suspicious, corrupt, backward, fundamentalist or even too stupid to grasp our enlightened version of reality, then we are in a bad Damascus neighborhood like Paul was before he got knocked off his horse.

**Orthopraxis and Orthodoxy detour**

I'm a believer in orthopraxis.

*Orthopraxis*

Ortho = right | praxis = practice

**as compared with**

*Orthodoxy*

ortho = right | doxy = belief

Paul's orthodoxy led to a very dark, overfunctioning "praxis". Paul knew he was right because he believed the right things. Yet, he applied them in such a way that his praxis led to evil outcome.

## **Les Misérables**

Paul reminds me of Inspector Javert in Les Misérables. Javert pursued a purity of purpose to in trying to bring Jean Valjean to justice. When he faced the fact that he might be barking up the wrong tree, Javert committed suicide in order to keep his orthodoxy intact. He would not have to face the fact that Valjean was a not a cartoon villain.

### **Peter**

Peter got to love Jesus after the resurrection in person. He had had a rough patch denying Jesus during the betrayal. Jesus shows up lakeside, gives fishing tips, and ups the ante. Peter's orthopraxis was lacking - he wasn't loving this early community of believers enough. He was, as the Gospel says, fishing in the wrong places. He knew the right things about Jesus (orthodoxy) but did not apply it as much as he was expected to. Jesus in person keeps asking Peter to love him by feeding the sheep - the followers of the way. To love the people more than anything else would be Peter's path of worship / would be his orthopraxis.

### **John 21** *The third appearance of Jesus after the resurrection*

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Peter was doing the "Best he could." And Paul was doing way more than most. But both of them needed course corrections - they needed good cop / bad cop doses of grace.

### **Don't "do the best you can"**

There's an old saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. All of us are doing the best we can, but there's always need for divine intervention. We need grace to make our lives function better than we can currently imagine. This, to me, is the truth of grace. This grace redeems good intentions of religious lunatics like Paul and strengthens the happy-go-lucky people like Peter. Grace is always tailored to the individual's needs. Right now, we can't experience new levels of grace until God gives us another dose. Grace is about seeing more deeply, more clearly, and loving more fully.

That's...amazing. Todd