

Allen Pruitt

Again and again,
they don't recognize Jesus.
They don't know it's him on Easter morning.
Thomas isn't sure it's him that night.
And today,
they don't know it's Jesus,
when he's standing on the shore.

I keep saying this,
week after week,
and the stories seem to say it's true:
Easter happened in the dark.
Resurrection is murky and confusing.
It was early on the first day of the week
when Mary didn't recognize him.
It was after dark that same night
when Jesus appeared in the upper room,
and the same thing next week with Thomas.
And here it is early in the morning,
just after daybreak
and again they don't recognize him.

I remember throwing the baseball with my dad
as the sun sank below the horizon.
I wanted to be out there.
It was cooler
and I didn't want the day to end.
But it was also a little dangerous,
throwing around a baseball
when it's about too dark to see.

That's just a little bit what this resurrection stuff must have felt like to them.
Hopeful,
you're glad it's happening.
But it all feels a little risky.

They can't tell just by looking,
that it's Jesus.

He has to do something,
something to help them remember.

He called Mary by name
and she suddenly recognized him and called him *Rabbi*.

He invited Thomas and all the rest to touch his wounds,
and they believed,
and Thomas called him *my Lord and my God*.

And today,

he reminds them
by doing something he always used to do,
something we've seen Jesus do before:

he tells them where to find the fish.

And they said,
It is the Lord!

We need little reminders.

Maybe sometimes big reminders.

Things that help us see that it's Jesus right in front of us,
reminders that help us to believe
that it's Jesus right in front of us.

Peter needed it,

more than any of the rest.

Remember how Peter denied Jesus three times?

Remember how Jesus said it would happen,
and Peter said,

Not me Lord!

And then went and denied Jesus anyway,
three times over.

We remember.

Peter remembered too.

Peter has to be wondering,
does Jesus remember?

It looks like he does.
Jesus remembers Peter's betrayal.

You wonder if Jesus heard that cock crow,
as he was bound and presented to Pontius Pilate.

Jesus must remember Peter's betrayal;
it's the only explanation I've got
for what happens in today's story.

After they've eaten their fish,
Jesus says to Peter,
Do you love me?
And Peter's immediate reply is,
Yes Lord,
You know that I love you.

-A second time Jesus says to Peter,
Do you love me?
And Peter is quick to say again,
Yes Lord,
you know that I love you.

-And a third time,
Do you love me?
This time Peter gets his back up.
He's hurt,
he's confused.
He says,
Lord you know everything,
you know that I love you.

Three times.
I wonder if off in the distance,
they heard a cock crow this time?

After all, this happens right at the break of day,
right when the cock is likely to crow.

Three times Peter denied Jesus.
Three times Jesus asks him today,
Do you love me?

As much as Peter sinned,
that is how much grace Jesus offers.
As much as Peter betrayed,
that is how many chances at redemption Jesus offers.

After being betrayed and dying on a cross,
Jesus still isn't through with forgiveness.

It's no wonder they don't recognize Jesus.
He doesn't look like anything they have ever seen before.
No one had ever seen endless grace before.

It's Creation Care Sunday.
Green Sunday.
Outdoor service.
I'm supposed to say something
about caring for creation
or loving the world
or something like that.

But I'll be honest,
I don't have many answers for that.

What I know
is that we bear a responsibility
for all the gifts that God has given us.
And the earth is the first
and among the greatest of those gifts.

We are stewards,
caretakers,
servants of our gifts,
because we are servants of our God.

We cannot hide from our responsibility
by minimizing our impact,
whether we are talking about climate change
or ways we pollute the soil
or our own beloved lake.

We bear a responsibility for those things
and ought not minimize our impact.

Our responsibility is to always understand that impact more and more.

We just sang Amazing Grace.

By now most of us know the story of this hymn.

John Newton was the captain of a slave ship in the late 1700's.

At some point his eyes are opened
to the horrors in which he has participated.

At some point he begs forgiveness,

writing an abolitionist pamphlet,
in which he apologized for

“a confession, which...comes too late

...It will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me,
that I was once an active instrument
in a business at which my heart now shudders.”

John Newton shudders at the work he did,
writing in his own epitaph that he was
“...By the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
preserved, restored, pardoned and appointed
to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy...”.

Which is some thing to say about yourself.
John Newton never said people shouldn't be Christian.
He never said that Jesus was wrong.
But he knew that by the way he lived his life,
his sins were an act of destruction
to the very faith he later began to preach.

That is some Amazing Grace.
To know well enough that you are forgiven,
that grace is real
and is pouring out for you and for the whole world,
to know and believe that well enough,
that you can be honest about where you have fallen short.

That is some Amazing Grace.

When have you known you were forgiven?
When was a time you know you did something wrong,
and then, unbelievably,
you knew you were forgiven?

Could you actually believe it?

I'm inviting you to believe it.
Jesus is inviting us to believe it.

Our temptation is to minimize our sins,
our failings,
and our falling short,
which only serves to minimize
the Amazing Grace
of the Almighty God.

Sin and death are real.
But so too
are grace
and love
and new life.

That is the good news of the gospel.
As many times as we sin.
As many times as we fail.
That is how much redemption there is.

This IS the good news of the gospel:
God will never be through with forgiveness.