

# “The Risen Jesus Revealed”

Acts 9:1-20, Revelation 5:11-14, John 21:1-19

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Dr. Carlyle Marney was one of the great preachers in the South during the time after the Second World War. He was a mentor and role model to many pastors. One of the stories that is told of him took place on a seminary campus where he had been invited to speak. One of the students asked, "Dr. Marney let us hear you say a word or two about the meaning of the resurrection." It was a fair question and an appropriate one from a future preacher to one who was already a great practitioner of the art of preaching. However the young seminary students were taken aback by Marney's response. Dr. Marney replied, "I will not discuss that with people like you." "Why not?" the students asked. Marney said, "I do not discuss such matters with anyone under thirty years of age. Look at you! Just look at you. You are in the prime of your life. Full of talent and energy. Very few if any of you have experienced poverty, failure, defeat, heartbreak or a brick wall that stops you dead in your tracks. So tell me, what can any of you know of a dark harsh world which only makes sense if Christ is raised from the dead?"

We have incredible scriptures once again this morning. The story of Saul's conversion and the images of this man breathing murderous threats against those who believed in Jesus is pretty compelling stuff. In the midst of all of his anger and disappointment in the world in which he lives he has an encounter with the risen Jesus and everything changes for Saul ... Soon to become Paul, the one who reaches out to show the world a God of love. . . . . . The Gospel text is a similarly compelling story. Peter and several of the disciples head out for a little fishing after having experienced the brutality of a crucifixion and death - - they catch nothing - someone comes and suggests trying the other side of the boat [really dumb - they are pro-fishermen] .... But when they listen and obey they catch 153 large fish. And finally they see that it is the risen Jesus.

These are great stories. But would they have seen the risen Jesus if they were under 30 years of age? Would we see and acknowledge the power of the resurrection if we did not first know the darkness of the world and our need for the Savior? Will we see the risen Jesus if we catch all the fish we want on our own?

The Easter Gospel is great stuff. People fill churches around the world to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. But amazingly in the weeks that follow the numbers drop off drastically as though it was nothing more than a great movie that you came to see and now that it has been seen there is no more reason to follow up with the story. Jesus risen from the dead .... A great story line but now lets get back to real life and we will take care of our own fishing. Who has any need for Jesus? When you are under 30 and full of talent and energy and everything is going OK who needs a risen Jesus? But then for that matter what if we are 40 or 50 or 80 and we have been taught to rely on ourselves and get everything figured out for ourselves and there is no way but my way .... Who really needs a risen Jesus.

The late, great Frank Sinatra used the song "My Way" as his theme song. It is a very familiar song that I suspect that many of us could probably call to mind right now as we might imagine him singing it. "And now, the end is near; And so I face the final curtain. My friend, Ill say it clear, Ill state my case, of which I'm certain.

I've lived a life that's full. I've traveled each and every highway;  
And more, much more than this, I did it my way.

It is a song that defines us in many ways. We travel along life's highways with the expectation that we will be able to do anything and everything we want just the way we want to do it. We are in charge - we can handle it all. We will do it my way!

I was surprised by the words of the closing verse.

For what is a man, what has he got? If not himself, then he has naught.

To say the things he truly feels; And not the words of one who kneels. The record shows I took the blows - And did it my way!

I don't really know how to understand those words. But it almost seems to be saying that we don't need to kneel in prayer .... Just say and do whatever you think and feel. Live for yourself.

It was interesting to read this week about a public high school teacher in California recently who asked his students, "Who is your hero?" I suppose that he expected the normal listing of great athletes, rock stars, the rich, the famous, maybe a few token moms and dads, brothers and sisters. He wasn't expecting was the answer he got. Eighty percent of his students said that their greatest "hero" was themselves. THEY were their own hero. Why would a roomful of high school kids believe that there is no one more "heroic" than themselves? That there is no one else worth looking up to? That there are no other lives, no other experiences, outside their own, that deserve to be honored, even emulated? What happens when we can no longer see beyond ourselves? What happens to our world when you always get YOUR own way - always do it my way? Is there a reason to look for a risen savior?

Saul probably would have been very comfortable in our modern world. I don't know if he would have really like the song "My Way" though. I suspect that he believed that everything he did was God's way. So he did it all his way thinking that it was God's way .... never willing to really look for or listen to God who had been calling and calling, over and over again - calling for people to see the new thing He was doing in Jesus Christ. Finally Saul had to run into a brick wall and be knocked to the ground before he could begin to see his own blindness. But there in the dirt he finally saw the risen Jesus revealed.

How long do we have to fish and catch nothing before we are willing to cast the net on the other side of the boat and finally see the risen Jesus revealed?

Yes, these are really exciting scriptures. Saul stumbling through a life of anger and hatred sees the risen Jesus. Peter denies knowing Jesus just before the crucifixion but now is willing to obey and reaps the reward as he stands face to face with the risen Jesus in forgiveness and love - a willingness to recommit to following the risen Jesus. In both cases we see lives that are transformed by their encounters with the risen one.

Have you seen the risen Jesus? Do we even want to see the risen Jesus? Or are we content with ourselves as our own heros? Are we content with all of our won understandings regarding the world? Are we content with fishing and catching nothing?

The book of Revelation gives us an incredible vision of all of creation transformed by the risen Lamb of God. With the struggle of the world filled with darkness there is songs of joy that rise to the throne of God . The song comes from every living creature as they recognize the power and glory of the Lamb that had been slain and now is risen. In that moment they fall down and worship because they know that there is hope for all of creation. It was interesting to note that the words "The Best Is Yet to Come" are imprinted on Frank Sinatra's grave marker. I don't know what that means for one who sang so well about doing it 'my way'. But I believe it is true .... because Christ is risen, the best is yet to come.

AMEN