

Starting Over, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. x3070422
Acts 9:1-6 and John 21:15-19
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 22 April 2007

I don't know about you, but my head is swirling. A war in Iraq drones on and on with more innocents dying by the scores daily. A promising young student, who had just hugged me at the close of Easter worship two days before, ended his life on the railroad tracks. I heard that news while I was meeting my new grandson in a far-off land. Global warming darkens the futures of our grandchildren. Sue and I had a violent bumpy landing at Raleigh Durham airport early Monday morning. Later that day, we heard the news that thirty two students and staff had been murdered in a psychotic rampage by a young man wielding handguns easily purchased without a background check.

We live in a crazy world. While we follow our own selfish pursuits, we neglect the earth that supports our living. Our best and most creative minds are being put to work designing X-boxes, radio-controlled attack drones, and razors with four blades. We should instead be designing ways the diverse cultures of this world can live together in peace on this tiny planet.

Crazy as it is, this world is little different than that of Jesus' and his disciples. We heard the report of the threats of a murder-breathing Paul, or Saul as he was called then. Paul was out to get the group of early followers of Jesus. Paul wasn't an evil sort of fellow, he just knew how people of faith were supposed to behave. He feared that the proper faith of Judaism was being threatened by these followers of the way. He wanted to keep the church clean and pure. The best way to overcome the threat and the fear was to kill off the disciples.

Paul was reacting the same way that Herod and Pilate and the Council reacted to Jesus. Jesus was a threat to the status quo. As John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg write, There has always been in this world, a system of domination and power.¹ It is controlled by the few who have money and military force. The system of domination is kept in power through wealth and brutality. Today, power is in the hands of the big international oil companies, the politicians in their pockets, and the military.

In Jesus' day, the domination system was controlled by the Romans. They ruled Judea through their puppets Herod and the High Priest. The High Priest and council kept their power as long as they pleased Rome. Jesus was a threat to the domination system. Pilate and the council and the high priest had to get rid of him, because of his popularity with the crowds. He did not bow to Herod or to Caesar, who called himself god. He bowed only to Jahweh God whom he called father. For this, he was put to death.

Peter and the other disciples had been no help to Jesus. Oh, they followed him around, all right, but they didn't understand him or his message. They thought the domination system could be overcome by the might of a new domination system led by Jesus and peasants. Remember when Jesus said he was going to Jerusalem to be handed over to the chief priests and scribes and be crucified? Jesus said he would be handed over to the Gentiles and they will mock him, spit upon him, and kill him, and after three days he will rise again.² James and John responded by

¹Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week of Jesus' Life* © 2006, Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, New York, NY, Harper Collins Publishers, page 7

²Mark 10:33-34

asking if they could sit on either side of him in his glory.³

The disciples were a great disappointment to Jesus. Remember Peter? He said, “Even though all become deserters, I will not.”⁴

Jesus replied, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.”⁵ The disciples were not ready or able to follow Jesus to the death provided by the domination system. There on Golgotha, Jesus died alone, with not a disciple to be seen.

So, we get to the scripture we heard this morning from John. It was the chance Jesus gave to Peter to start all over. We all need a chance to start over.

The three times of requesting by Jesus meant, “Do you really love me? If you do, you will feed my sheep.” Jesus was saying, “I don’t want to hear you say you love me; show me you love me by taking care of my people. “Feed my sheep.”

My grandson Brady needs to know that he is loved by God. Do you love him? Feed him! He wakes up every two and a half hours to be fed. (Babies are cute, but they need to be fed and changed.) Don’t tell him you love him, do it! Feed him! Change him! Don’t say you love Jesus; feed his sheep!

Michael Foreman needed to know that he was loved by God. Do you love him? Feed him! Tend to his needs. Don’t say you love Jesus; feed his sheep!

The Virginia Tech shooter Seung-Hui Cho needed to know that he was loved by God. Do you love him? Feed him! Tend to the needs of lonely, the depressed, and yes, the psychotic. Don’t say you love Jesus; feed his sheep!

This earth on which we live– do we love it as God’s creation? Don’t say you love God’s creation, feed it! Live it. Stop raping the earth, darkening the skies, and polluting the rivers just so you can make a profit. Today is the “Day of Prayer of Hope for Global Warming”, or Earth Day. Our Green Church Committee is helping to lead us in reducing our expulsion of greenhouse gases. They have provided composters to turn our garbage and trash into mulch. They’ve urged us to install more energy efficient lighting. They are hosting an Energy Audit Workshop next Saturday. You can help by taking some of steps outlined in your yellow bulletin insert. You don’t have to do a lot, but do something. Stop saying you love Jesus and feed his sheep.

Follow in Jesus’ footsteps and threaten the system of domination and power. You will not overcome the system or your fear by buying a handgun. You will do it by knowing that God loves you and will sustain you. You will do it by turning the other cheek, by loving your enemy, and by caring for the poor and powerless. Don’t say you love Jesus; feed his sheep!

In the midst of a crazy world, the only way I can keep my head from spinning is to keep on following Jesus. Keep the faith. Keep feeding Jesus’ sheep.

³Mark 10:37

⁴Mark 14:29

⁵Mark 14:30