

On the Right Side

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Sermon for April 30, 1995

Lessons for the Third Sunday of Easter - Year C

Acts 9:1-20

Psalm 30

Revelation 5:11-14

John 21:1-14

I don't like to be wrong. I hate it when I'm wrong. I always want to be right. Big surprise, huh? But consider this...I want to *know* when I'm wrong. How does this square with always wanting to be right? Very easily, you see, the sooner you point out to me that I was wrong, the sooner I can get back to being right.

How many of us grew up hearing from someone that you should never correct grownups when they're wrong? Fortunately, I didn't hear that too often in *my* family, but when I *did* hear someone say that, I hated it. It made no logical sense to me...wouldn't the grownup rather know that she was wrong so she could stop making a fool of herself? Apparently not...in my youthful naïveté I neglected to account for the role that ego plays in adults, and the fact that nothing is more embarrassing than to be shown up by a kid. Fortunately, there's been some progress on that front...in the computer world, most of us, myself included, have pretty much conceded that when the going gets rough, you call an eighth grader...it's amazing what those kids can fix.

I said that I always want to be right. I *didn't* say that I always wanted my opinion to be the right one. What I'm saying, and it's a very subtle difference, is that I want to have the opinion that *is right*, I want to be

on the side that *is* right, and if I'm currently on the wrong side, I want to be corrected. Hey...when I get lost, I ask for directions...I learned that from my father.

We all like to be right. So then why do so many of us hate to be corrected...especially by kids and others we perceive to be outside our area of expertise? It's an ego issue...we want to be right, so we can't admit that we were wrong. We're afraid that the person correcting us is going to show us up. Yet, isn't that person doing us a favor? After all, he could just as well have let us go on looking like fools. As a teacher I know that you need to be corrected in order to do better. Yet why do so many of us resist correction?

"Put the net on the *right* side." Peter and his companions were experienced fishermen, and could easily have said, "Who *is* this guy on the shore, anyway?" They had been out in the boat all night, caught nothing, and now some guy they don't know from Adam tells them to try putting the net on the other side of the boat. Right...big difference that's gonna make...if there ain't fish on this side of the boat, there ain't gonna be any on that side either. How many of us would've reacted that way? Yet, Peter and company took the correction, cast the net on the other side of the boat, and voila...breakfast.

Saul was on his way to Damascus to persecute some more Christians when he saw the light...really, that's where we get the phrase from. What made him different from the other members of the religious establishment? What was it about *him* that made Jesus take the time to say, "Saul, get on the *right side*"? I'd like to think that it was that he actually believed in what he was doing. He wasn't concerned about Temple politics, or keeping the Romans happy, or what this fledgling movement might do to his career. He honestly thought that this was a heretical movement. He honestly thought that he was serving God...his God...our God...by getting rid of these people. Fortunately, Jesus met him before he did too much more damage, said, "Guess again, guy," and corrected him.

Jesus told Peter and Saul that they were on "the wrong side." He didn't tell them in order to show them up. He told them in order to *correct* them, so that they could get on the *right side*. Or to paraphrase John 3:17, "Jesus didn't come into the world to gloat at our stupidity, but to correct us." He corrects us because he loves us, because he wants us with him. On his side...at his side.

Notice what Saul *didn't* do...he didn't start out with a whole list of reasons why he thought he was right to do what he did. He didn't try to make excuses, he didn't try to justify himself before God. He gave the only really proper response to being corrected, he simply said, "Oops. Sorry." and then got on the right side, just as Peter and his friends put their net on the right side.

How many of us can accept correction so easily, and without feeling threatened? It's not always easy for me...just ask Cheryl,

she'll be happy to tell you. How many of us are willing to accept the fact that we need to be corrected by God, and see his willingness to correct us as a sign of his love for us? How many of us see correction as his trying to make us *better*?

Jesus corrected Peter and Saul. But how often do *we* get corrected? How often do we really allow ourselves to be corrected? How often do we actually *ask* to be corrected? When we pray, do we say, "God, please correct me if I'm wrong," or are we more likely to say, "Please let me be right"?

It always amuses me when I hear people give detailed reasons why someone else's theological point of view is wrong. Usually, what it boils down to is "But I grew up believing it was this way, I was taught that it was this way. And God can't do things differently than the way I was taught." Yeah...right. What are you going to say *when*, not "if", but *when* God says to you, "Yo, Deanna...", "Yo, Steve...", "Yo, Debbie...you were wrong about this one"? Are you going to argue with him, pointing out how you did the best you could with the information you had at the time, are you going to resist because so much of yourself is tied up in having your point of view be right, or are you going to be able to realize that God still loves you in spite of the fact that you blew it on quite a few issues, and is correcting you because he loves you and wants to make you better?

Personally, I look forward to saying "Oops, sorry" quite a bit someday, because then that will put me on the right side...and as I said before, I always have to be right.