

**The Third Sunday of Easter
Holy Cross
The Rev. John E. Shields
April 18, 2010**

Have you ever read an advertisement from a church seeking a new Rector or Associate? Well, it is sort of interesting. Here are some ads from old issues of The Living Church --- which calls itself an ‘independent weekly serving Episcopalians since 1878.’

This isn’t an endorsement of The Living Church. I personally do not care for the magazine, but I read it to keep up with what is going on in the church and to hear a particular point of view with which I often disagree. Anyway here are some ads seeking clergy.

Christ Church, Woodbury New Jersey: “...our 147 year-old parish seeks a rector for a family-oriented congregation ---- Debt free --- traditional masses and fine music and education -- - we seek a candidate with strengths as pastor, preacher and teacher with administrative skills to lead our parish of 500 members...”

St. Andrews, Roswell, New Mexico: seeks “an energetic and proactive leader to serve our active membership.” (They) boast of an established endowment and well-maintained facility --- wide-open spaces and God’s palette in the sky.

Here’s one for an Assistant: Christ Church, Easton, MD: “Successful candidates will have strong interpersonal and group facilitation skills, a passion for teaching and excellent preaching ability...”

It seems that in general the church is looking for leaders who have good pastoral skills, strong preaching ability, good teaching techniques, plus a bent for administration as well as strong interpersonal and group facilitation skills ---- none mentioned walking on water, but I think that is a given.

In light of our readings from scripture today, I would like to try some new qualifications out to see if they might work for church leadership

Wanted --- Leader for our church ---- personal history will include a propensity for jumping to conclusions and boasting of personal loyalty and fidelity. There must be a willingness to stick one's neck out and suffer being corrected. Particularly we seek a candidate who, when the pressure is really on, will jump ship, skip out, or at least deny in multiples of three any previously announced commitment and personal loyalty.

Or here's a good one: Wanted --- Leader for our church --- necessary skills will include ability to know every jot and tittle of the church law. Prospect must be fervent in pursuing anyone who is outside of orthodox boundaries. Candidate should be comfortable with executing capital punishment on religious heretics and witnessing such events whenever possible. Willingness to travel a must.

Maybe you have figured out where this is headed.

The church of Jesus Christ was founded and developed by the two men who fit the latter descriptions:

Peter and Paul.

Peter --- we read about in today's gospel --- Jesus appears on the beach and the ever-impetuous Peter jumps in the water to wade ashore and greet Jesus.

In the verses immediately following today's reading we have what is often described as the 'reinstatement of Peter.'

You may remember that three times Peter denies Jesus

So, in this instance, Jesus asks Peter three times to 'feed my sheep.'

In our reading from Acts, we find our second candidate for church leadership. Paul (who in the beginning of our learning about him was called Saul.)

Paul, (Saul) is so dedicated to his understanding of his own religious faith that he is actively seeking out for persecution any who might be perceived as a threat to it. For instance, Paul was present, and no doubt approving, at the stoning to death of Stephen – the first Christian martyr ---

Paul is interrupted on his way to Damascus where he is hoping to find more Christian victims. He is on his way to find and persecute the followers of Jesus.

The light of Jesus blinds Paul as he appears to Paul (then called Saul) on the road to Damascus.

On the backs of these two most unlikely people, God decides to rest responsibility for building the church.

Peter and Paul:

Peter, who appears cowardly and denies Jesus in the most difficult time for Jesus.

Paul, who the texts says, is “...still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord...”

Peter and Paul.

Neither Peter nor Paul would have gotten past the Human Resources committee of any parish I know.

Neither Peter nor Paul would have cleared a parish discernment committee; Yet Peter and Paul are the two most obvious pillars of the new faith.

Peter – the rock upon which Christ will build his church. Paul - the evangelist to the gentiles.

Of course there is one other person who is not mentioned in today’s texts that I believe is just as important as the two we have already mentioned. It is a woman and she is mentioned in all four gospels as the first witness to the resurrection.

Of course an ad for her might read: Seeking woman with history of demon possession (at least seven preferred). Applicant should be given to seeing angels and talking with them. Teller of hard if not impossible to believe news is a prerequisite. If applicant has a rumored past as a shady lady, it will help.

Of course I am speaking of Mary Magdalene.

So there you have it – the church was founded by Peter, Paul and Mary.

Let's face it; God always uses the most improbable people to do God's most important work.

Now my point is fairly obvious this morning. If God can use a coward and a killer and a woman with a questionable reputation to start God's church in the world then maybe, just maybe you and I might also be qualified as disciples and followers of Jesus.

It is clear that God is much bigger and more creative than our ability to conceptualize.

God can use us who ever we are, wherever we are, whatever we've done or not done.

God can and will use us when and where God wants us.

And finally, did you notice that Jesus appears to the disciples at work --- not at church!

The disciples are fishing. Paul is traveling.

Jesus meets them where they are.

Jesus meets us where we are and says to us "Come, follow - I have much for you to do. The world needs you to spread my love and peace to all with whom you come in contact – everyday, everywhere you are."

Amen