**3 Easter, April 14, 2013, John 21: 1-19; The Rev. Mary S. Trainor**

She is around my same age, from Baltimore, Maryland, and like me has three sisters. As a teenager back in July of 1967, she dove into a body of water that turned out to be too shallow for diving; her neck was broken. She was instantly paralyzed becoming a quadriplegic, and only survived because someone pulled her out. During her long rehabilitation, she was angry and depressed, and had suicidal thoughts. She can't do any of the simple things in life for herself: like sit up, wash, eat. She lives strapped into a wheelchair, and has to have someone helping her 24/7. I am speaking of a woman you may have heard of named Joni Eareckson Tada.

Today's scriptures give us examples of others facing life's troubles:

- Our first reading from the book of Acts tells the dramatic story of when **Paul** (*then named Saul*) was struck blind while traveling on the road to Damascus *(which is now the capital of the war torn country of Syria)*

- Psalm 30 gives us words from people crying out to God and weeping

- The Gospel tells us about **Peter**, who denyed Jesus three times, going out fishing for hours and hours with other disciples. But they catch no fish.

Oh yes, life can be very difficult, and we here know it! We have health issues, we make mistakes and have lived with the consequences, we get depressed, we have relationship problems. Do the life stories of these people, Joni and Paul, Peter, end there -- with their troubles? No.

Here is **"the rest of the story**," as Paul Harvey used to say.

-What has happened to quadrapeligic **Joni Eareckson Tada**, all these years later? People prayed for her, told her about Jesus' love, and she began to read the bible. The only way she could read was to have someone put it open on the floor while she was hanging in a circle bed face down. Someone came and turned the pages. Her life gradually turned upwards. Joni learned to paint with a brush between her teeth, she even made an album singing hymns. In 1982 she got married; her husband Ken works with her in her various ministries. Joni wrote her autobiography, and has written many books since.In 2002 her radio broadcast received the “Radio Program of the Year" award. Her "Wheels for the World" ministry collects wheelchairs, which are refurbished by prison inmates and transported globally where wheelchairs are not available. Oh, her problems have not gone away -- she is still in a wheelchair and in 2010 she was diagnosed with cancer; she is now living with that cancer. Joni carries on drawing all of her strength and purpose from Christ.

- What happened to **Paul**? God sent a man named Ananias to pray over Paul to be filled with the Spirit and to have his sight restored, and Paul's blindness was taken away. Paul's life began anew: God gave him a vital ministry in building the early church, spreading the Good News of Jesus to people far and wide -- and helping us today too through his letters in the New Testament, which show us what it how to live as Christians.

- Moving onto Psalm 30, what happened to those **people who had troubles with health and enemies**? Their redemption is from the Lord. Psalm 30 says "***joy comes in the morning***"and that they "***cried out to the Lord and He restored them to health"*** and the Lord is their "***helper."***

- And then to today's Gospel: what happened to Peter? The answer is: a lot! The risen Christ appeared as Peter and the others were out in the boat fishing, and He said "***Cast the net to the right side of the boat.***" And, right away, they caught so many fish that they were barely able to pull them all in! But, the story does not end there--there was more to this Gospel story -- Jesus was not done with Peter yet.

Jesus had breakfast with them, and then had a special time just with Peter. He turned to Peter and said, ***"Peter, do you love me?"*** We know God loves us, we have heard this since we were all small children. But can you imagine being Peter here having to answer that question? Whew....not easy...."*well, of course I do,*" Peter must have thought, "*but do I really really love Jesus with all my heart, soul, mind and strength? Hmmm*...." This was a moment between Jesus and Peter, for Jesus was patiently teaching Peter about what it meant to love Him deeply, completely. You see, Jesus was getting Peter ready for the challenging ministries to which he was called: to serve as the rock upon which the church was going to be built! It was only God's love that would sustain Peter through the tough times ahead, and Jesus was preparing him. That perfect love of God that Jesus was talking with Peter about is amazing! When we receive and experience it, it fills us so incredibly with God's Light that it is like nothing else on this earth. And our response to this love is praise and gratitude. This all consuming praise and gratitude was captured today in our Revelation reading, about the "***myriads and thousands of thousands: singing with full voice praises to God."*** Wow! Isn't that a heavenly image?

We are in the Easter season, the season when we celebrate Christ's resurrection. Resurrection is about how God raises you too; it is about your life having purpose, it is about restoration of what needs restored in you. All those stories I told of people today were stories about people who needed restoration, and God restored them. God will restore you too, if you let His love in. Oh, don't get me wrong -- you, like them, are not promised a trouble free life just because you start really living as a Christian. But oh my, God will restore and renew you in lots of different, unexpected ways if you let Him. Paul was the worst of sinners, and Peter a coward, and Joni Eareckson Tada is more disabled than any of us can even imagine surviving through. God didn't physically cure them all, but God redeemed them all and had a purpose for each of them.

God has a purpose for you too. God wants you to experience His amazing love for you, and you can experience this as He makes Himself known to you. This happens in different ways: through nature, the bible and Christian books, prayer, through other Christians you get to know, through service, through coincidences that happen in our lives --but you have to be looking and paying attention, you have to be open to new experiences and meeting new people. Look ahead for the purpose God has for you by doing something new, like attending Bible Study for the first time, or going to the Community Meal, or signing up for Cursillo, or asking me your questions, or volunteering in a ministry of the church (see the new "Menu of Ways to Serve through St. John's" in your bulletin).

As the Lord said in our Acts reading, you are ***"an instrument whom I have chosen."*** Point yourself forward, to a new beginning and to restoration by the Lord, in the Light of the Resurrection. Amen.