On Monday I experienced an unremarkable but undeniable internal . . . event, I suppose I could call it.

My head was all full of future events and responsibilities, running the gamut from profound to trivial

* The upcoming funeral for LaVerne Broad and baptisms of Christian and Aurora Gray
* Speaking at a memorial for a dear friend in another venue
* Collapsing ceiling in our garage at home
* Problems with both cars
* Dental woes
* Returning to running post-Covid
* Cards and letters to write

In other words . . . life. My usual response to such a list has been to grit my teeth, bear down, prepare to do my duty, and then to go through my list in a dutiful way.

But on Monday morning, something lifted inside me. It was unremarkable, as I’ve said, because I doubt that anything looked much different on the outside, but it was a dramatic moment on the inside. Yes, I got a couple of items checked off my list right away, but doing them felt different somehow.

Instead of looking at accomplishing these tasks as proof of my worth, I could see them as things adults do in life—neither bad nor good, just life-stuff. Even though some of the “stuff” was or is important to other people to some degree.

If getting things done is not a measure of one’s worth, if making a mistake or being neglectful of chores, whether significant or mundane is just that and not a way of determining one’s right to have a place in the world, then there’s no need to assess blame—my own or anyone else’s, as in “If that person had acted responsibly, then I wouldn’t have done (or failed to do) . . . the action in question.” That leads to, “Hence, it was their fault. So I am okay.” Or, conversely, “Totally my fault, so I’m not okay.”

My flash of insight was something like looking at any item—or the sum total of all the items—on the list and thinking, “This is the way things are; this is life. Now what do I ned to do?”

It remains important, of course, to recognize whatever past action might have created or led to a problem (like with the house or cars), but only insofar as it helps me to avoid repeating those actions in the future. (Change the filter on the AC more often, etc.)

A couple of observations in light of the reading from Acts:

* I wasn’t breathing threats and murder on anyone (well, maybe unnamed threats on myself)
* There was no blinding flash—just a shift in perspective; and who knows how long it will last, because this wasn’t the first time. Actually, I wrote this on Monday, and by Thursday it was as if this had never occurred to me, and I my thinking had devolved into the old patterns of negative self-judgment. (As I noted recently, Paul, even after he stopped being Saul, was the same kind of zealous person he had been before his blinding flash.)
* I recognized the difference—my voice from God was not a booming indictment but something more like, “Isn’t this a better way to approach life?”

Today’s readings are filled with blinding and regaining sight in various settings and ways both large and small. The scales on Paul’s eyes. Ananias’s fear transformed to trust; he understandably feared Saul because of his reputation, yet he, Ananias, trusts the Lord and calls Saul “brother” when he approaches him.

The psalmist made me wonder if he or she had had a liberating experience similar to the one I’ve described: “I will exalt you O Lord, because you have lifted me up.” That is, “you have shown me that I am your beloved child, regardless of what I accomplish or fail to accomplish.” “What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the Pit?” whether that is the pit of depression or the pit of worthlessness we have dug for ourselves.

Jesus’ own closest friends didn’t recognize him standing right in front of them on the beach. We don’t know why. For one thing, they weren’t expecting him. For another, they were busy with their work in the world—fishing—and were possibly frustrated because they had caught nothing in their over-night fishing trip.

It was only when they were liberated from their exhaustion and disappointment that they were able to see clearly, to see their friend and teacher. And even then they were a bit uncertain; they still had an urge to ask “who are you?” even afterward.

As a matter of fact, that line in the gospel intrigues me: “Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ because they knew it was the Lord.” What I take from that is an echo of last week’s account of Doubting Thomas: Even though they knew, the knowledge was new to them and flew in the face of common sense and reason.

After this whole episode—and only after—did Jesus repeat his question and marching orders three times: “Do you love me? Feed my sheep.”

Perhaps it was because Jesus wanted Peter and the others—including us—to continue his ministry from a place of love rather than mere duty. He even warned Peter in broad, cryptic terms that this was not going to be a bed of roses. And maybe the tough row ahead of Peter could be borne only by love and not by obedience alone.

Implicit, I believe, in the “Do you love me?” question is Jesus’ love for Peter and all of us. And implicit in the allusion to Peter’s struggles and eventual death is the reassurance that it-this ministry of love—is more than just worthwhile. It is what makes life an exciting adventure and not something just to be endured.

Even in the worst of times there are moments of true and deep human connection which, in the end, seem to be God’s way of forging and maintaining the divine-human bond. + + +