

## “Strike-Out Simon”

Acts 9:1–6, Revelation 5:11–14, John 21:1–19

“Casey at the Bat” is a humorous poem written in 1888 by Ernest Lawrence Thayer. It tells the story of a star baseball player from the small town of Mudville who is last man up at the bottom of the ninth inning ... the home team trailing.

Casey lets two pitches go by, then swings at and misses the third pitch ... thereby causing his team to lose the game. The poem ends with these lines:

Oh, somewhere in this favoured land  
the sun is shining bright,  
The band is playing somewhere,  
and somewhere hearts are light;  
And somewhere men are laughing,  
and somewhere children shout,  
But there is no joy in Mudville—  
mighty Casey has struck out.

Twenty years later, another versifier named Grantland Rice published a sequel titled “Casey’s Revenge.” The poem begins with these words:

There were saddened hearts in Mudville  
for a week or even more;  
There were muttered oaths and curses –  
every fan in town was sore.

“Just think,” said one, “how soft it looked  
with Casey at the bat,  
And then to think he’d go and  
spring a bush league trick like that!”  
All his past fame was forgotten –  
he was now a hopeless “shine.”  
They called him “Strike-Out Casey,”  
from the mayor down the line;

Casey’s performance takes a nosedive:

He “fanned” or “popped out” daily, like some minor league recruit.

The poem goes on to tell of a re-match with the other team ... and of Casey’s redemption as he hits the ball so hard that it is never found, scoring a home run with the bases loaded, thereby winning the game for Mudville.

Three slam-bang Scripture passages confront us this Third Sunday of Easter ...

- In the first reading, the Risen Christ confronts the already-overly-zealous Saul on the Road to Damascus
  - Giving Saul an extreme makeover ...
- In the second reading, the Risen Christ – the lamb that was slain – reigns in heaven
  - After having given the whole creation an extreme makeover ...
- In the Gospel reading, the Risen Christ meets a band of disciples-gone-fishing on the beach ...
  - Giving “strike-out Simon Peter” an extreme makeover ... and a second chance ...

So, what’s a preacher to do when faced with such wonderful choices ...?

- All three point to the transforming power of the resurrection ...
- But today’s story from John’s Gospel is especially moving ...

The writer takes us to the shore of the Sea of Galilee, where the Risen Christ cooks breakfast for the disciples:

- This is Jesus’ third Resurrection appearance in John’s Gospel ...
- It shows us dramatically that Jesus, once broken beyond fixing, is risen from the dead ... certainly the most extreme of makeovers ... and that ...
- He has the power to make lives over ...

He had told the disciples to go home ... back to Galilee ... but didn’t give them his itinerary.

- So seven of the disciples decide when they get back to do what they know how to do ... go fishing ...
  - Peter, James and John, Thomas, Nathanael and two others
- They fish all night without catching anything ...
- Jesus shows up on the shore ...
  - “How’s the fishing this morning?”
  - “Rotten ...”
  - “Try again ... on the right.”

- Big catch ...
- Jesus has a hot breakfast waiting for them ...
  - Bread and fish ...
- Feels like Communion ...
- After breakfast, Jesus has a talk with Peter ...
  - Whom Jesus and we could have called “Strikeout Simon” ...
  - After all, he had denied Jesus three times ...
  - Giving Simon a second chance, he asks Simon three times if he loves him ...
  - The way Jesus chooses his words is odd ...
    - You see, New Testament Greek had three words for love: *Agape*, *philea*, *eros*
      - *Eros* – “Emotional love” ... the kind of love that we “fall into” ... and ...
      - *Philea* – “Friendship love” ... and ...
      - *Agapé* – The kind of love that couples grow into after the fires of passion die down ... First Corinthians 13 love ... “love divine, all loves excelling” ...
    - “Do you love me with *agapé* love?” Jesus asks first ...
      - Simon responds with something like “I love you as a friend.”
    - Jesus asks again, “Do you love me with *agapé* love?” ...
      - Simon responds again, “I love you as a friend.”
    - Finally Jesus meets Simon where he is ... using Simon’s word for love
      - To which Simon responds, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”
- He then commissions Peter to pastoral leadership after each response
  - “Feed my lambs.”
  - “Shepherd my sheep.”
  - “Feed my sheep.”

- This gentle, wooing approach makes “strikeout” Simon over into Peter the Rock
  - Gives him power to face the future.
  - Gives him power to follow and serve.
  - Gives him power to grow into mature love.

“Casey’s Revenge” ends with these lines

... Was that a rifle shot?  
 Above the fence in center field in rapid whirling flight  
 The sphere sailed on – the blot grew dim  
 and then was lost to sight.  
 Ten thousand hats were thrown in air,  
 ten thousand threw a fit,  
 But no one ever found the ball that mighty Casey hit.

O, somewhere in this favored land  
 dark clouds may hide the sun,  
 And somewhere bands no longer play  
 and children have no fun!  
 And somewhere over blighted lives  
 there hangs a heavy pall,  
 But Mudville hearts are happy now,  
 for Casey hit the ball.

The power of the resurrection as Peter experienced it is the power to make lives over ...

- It is the power to face the future after repeated failures ...
- It is the power answer Jesus’s call to follow and serve ...
- It is the power to grow into mature love ...

And that’s the Gospel truth!

Blessing and glory and wisdom and  
 thanksgiving and honor and power and  
 might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.