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“What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you?” (John 6:30).

Acts 8:51--8:1; John 6:30-35

As a storyteller, God surpasses every renowned novelist for basic plots, subplots, twists and turns in the Great Narrative of the world from creation to redemption. Just when we think we know what comes next, God surprises us by bringing continuity out of shocking discontinuity. We need only look at the genealogy from Abraham to Jesus to see the divine genius at work salvaging the holy from the unholy, pulling triumph from defeat.

Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets by his suffering and death, then hands on the leadership of his church to two of the most unlikely failures imaginable. Peter is all bluster, then cowardice, as he denies even knowing Jesus on the eve of his crucifixion. Yet, Peter is the rock on which the church is built. In today's reading from Acts, we find Saul holding the cloaks of those who are stoning Stephen. It is the beginning of Saul's call to become Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

It was not easy for the early church to grasp God's story line in the apparent defeat of Jesus on the cross, but the stunning event of the resurrection sent them back to the Scriptures to see what had been hidden in plain sight. The fourth Gospel lays out the case for Jesus in seven signs that reveal him as the divine I AM, visible in all the major themes and figures of the biblical narrative. Jesus is Bridegroom, Living

Water, the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, the Paschal Lamb, the Resurrection and the Life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus draws the crowd from physical bread to the manna in the desert God gave Israel on its journey through the desert. When they beg for this bread, he reveals himself as the "bread come down from heaven for the life of the world." Whoever eats this bread and comes to believe in Jesus will never hunger or thirst again.

No one will articulate the mystery of the Eucharist as well as Paul, transformed by his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. No one will preach the Gospel of mercy with as much conviction as Peter, healed by Jesus and sent to feed his sheep and lambs.

God writes straight with crooked lines, which is Good News for all of us who are adding our sinful, fragmented stories to the larger narrative of God's love at work in salvation history. United with Christ, our small stories filled with our own twists and turns are woven into the great redemptive mystery of his life, death and resurrection. This is why Easter is as much about us as it is about him.

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