When I was little I went through a period where I was really into sharks, and by really into I mean a borderline clinical obsession. I read about them, looked at pictures of them and tried to get my parents to take me to aquariums so that I could see them. In my bedroom it was always shark week. But then one day I moved on and stopped my shark studies. As a result of this sudden and abrupt disengagement my shark knowledge gradually began to evaporate and today outside of being able to hum the Jaws theme there is little else that would make you think of me as any sort of shark expert. Certainly you would not want me on your team for celebrity shark week on Jeopardy, because most of my once opulent collection of shark trivia is gone. My knowledge of sharks is on par with my knowledge of Scandinavian breakfast cereals – I’m vaguely aware that some may exist. The rule of use it or lose it came very true in terms of what I know about sharks.

I thought about this today because we have two or possibly three conversion stories in our readings. And I would ask that you bear with me for a moment because sharks and these conversion narratives will eventually all tie together – at least they do in my mind, but you can be the judge of that when I finish. So first, just a bit about the conversions and the definition that I am going to use. For purposes of this sermon, conversion will be defined as some sort of transformation (i.e. you were one way before and another way after). The first is the most obvious conversion in our readings is that of Saul (who would become Paul). He sees a blinding flash and hears a voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" prompting him to ask, "Who are you, Lord?" with the reply coming, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." It is in this moment that Saul (Paul) goes from being a persecutor of the Church to one of its greatest evangelists. It is very clear-cut conversion, he was one way and a moment later he was another way.

Now for the less obvious conversions: In the Revelation of John we have the scene of angels surrounding the throne and “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, ‘To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’" It ends with the elders falling down in worship. Now, as stated, this might not seem as much a conversion as Paul, but I would argue that it was in this moment of singing and praising that Jesus once again became real, that is why they react by falling down. There is a moment of transformation, a moment where the reality of Jesus shifts their hearts and minds. It is very similar to what happens in our Gospel reading from John. The setup is a second miraculous catch of fish, which is reminiscent of the catch Peter experienced when he first came to follow Jesus. This time however it is after the catch of fish, when the disciple who Jesus loved points out to those in the boat that it is in fact Jesus on the shore, Peter reacts by jumping into the sea and swimming to Jesus. And yes it is indisputable that before this moment Peter already believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but in this instance Jesus became even more real and Peter dropped everything to be with him. I would argue that the second two stories demonstrate that conversion is not simply a one time thing like we see in the story of Paul in Acts, but is rather something that can and should be done daily. In these last two stories there is a moment where the inner most beings of those involved are so overwhelmed by whom Jesus is they either fall down or leave everything to be with him. The readings that we have today are in some ways held together by this thread of conversion. And if I may speculate, I think those that compiled the lectionary wanted to remind us that we did not wrap everything up with the Resurrection, but rather we must continue our conversion. The Christian life is not a single moment of change but is a daily living in the reality of what God did for us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Okay so now as promised back to the sharks and the fact that knowing a lot about them at the age of six does not translate into knowing a lot about them today. In much the same way having known a lot about God ten years ago does not translate into a deep and abiding relationship today. We must always refresh our knowledge and love. There is an idea among some Christians that there is a moment in which we are saved and there is a reasonable argument for this understanding, but there is also a danger in it. And that danger is that we can feel like we are done. That being saved is just something that is part of us and does not need to be nurtured or enhanced. And so if you hated the shark illustration let me offer another one. Think of conversion like our heart (our actual physical one not our spiritual one). We all have one but to have a healthy heart we need to avoid certain things. Things like a sedentary lifestyle, subsisting solely on Little Debbie Snack Cakes and having too much stress in our lives. But it is not simply things that must be avoided, there is also an active side to having a healthy heart. We need to exercise, we need to eat a balanced diet and we need to have deep and abiding support systems, which help mitigate the stress in our lives. Similarly, if there is a moment that we are saved, this cannot be the only moment. We must work and grow in God. I would argue that God must become real for us everyday. Or put another way we must convert every day. If the moment that God became real for you was the moment where you felt you were saved, this should not be an article in a museum to be studied and observed like the Elgin Marbles, but should serve as a pattern for everyday life. In our Gospel lesson today we know the history of Peter. We know he was the first person to say to Jesus, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” We know that Peter had already seen and interacted with the resurrected Jesus. We know that Peter knows who Jesus is. He has been saved, he has had a born again experience or whatever you want to call it, but in the moment when they have a miraculous haul of fish and the disciple who Jesus loves points out that the man they are seeing on the beach is Jesus all of this happens again. Jesus becomes real in a very exciting way. That is what we are striving for.

I have heard it said of forgiveness that it is not something you do once, but something you do every time you recall the situation. In other words, if you have forgiven me for something terrible that I have done you will have to forgive me every time you see me or remember that thing, it does not simply evaporate. Similarly, with our spiritual lives we must grow in our understanding of God in such a way that every day we are filled with love and desire for God. We may not jump into the water and swim like Peter did, but that is the kind of excitement we should have as we seek to see the risen Lord. Our goal is to discover a little more of God every day and have God fill a little more of our lives every day. Some people have been fortunate enough to have very powerful experiences of God, but that is not where things end, because with God there is no end. We must convert daily strengthening our love and knowledge of God both today and forevermore.