

March 8, 2015 Sermon

Peter denies Jesus

I am Peter; you are Peter – who of us can't identify with him?

As I thought about this sermon and the way it impacts us all, the story of one of our children came to mind. When our 4 children were young, well let's see our youngest would have been maybe 7 so which means the others would have been 10, 13 & 15 we cleaned the old Maple City Church house on the corner of Jefferson & 8<sup>th</sup> street. This is how our children earned their allowances and it also paid for a spring break trip to Disney World in FL one year. We each had our responsibilities to perform. Years after we worked at this together I realized how we traumatized our youngest. We were all aware of the bats that made their home somewhere in the church and they would make their appearance on occasion. Our youngest job was to empty all trash cans and his fear was finding a bat in the trash, which indeed he had found at one point and it further traumatized him. One of my jobs was to sweep the auditorium and you would be amazed and maybe dismayed, what all one finds! On a particular day I found a note written by none other than one of our children describing an act this child had committed and was boasting about it. To say the least I was dismayed and pained by what was on the note.

After considering our course of action Sheldon & I confronted the child and in the moment of confrontation the child denied what had been written..... they had been caught, found out, exposed, this child felt trapped and was trapped.

Coming from their bedroom about 15 min. later the child tearfully confessed to having written the note and the truth of its contents. We as parents were deeply pained with the content and

the denial, but also deeply grateful that the denial had been confessed. There were consequences established for the act and in the days to come this child new the pain of earning trust back. The lesson was learned and yes at this point I would trust this child with the most precious belonging of mine. This child had failed, been exposed, had repented and received forgiveness, and has become trust worthy and authentic.

My guess is that there are as many stories of deception in this room as there are people. It is something we can all identify with.

### **I am Peter, you are Peter.**

We know this man Peter as one who embraced life boldly, for good or not so good. We often see him as the big fisherman with a rugged physique, a strong man who was accustomed to hauling heavy dripping nets full of fish out of the Sea of Galilee. We imagine him with a strong, bold commanding voice.

Peter's story is one of risk, fumbles, denial and also one of grace, love and renewal, a life rich with experiences. He lived a full life. We recall Peter's name being changed; Jesus called him the "rock."

Peter was the one who got out of the boat and walked on the water, yes he dipped under, but he did walk on the water with Jesus. He confessed at one point that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God." We remember that it was Peter who when Jesus wanted to wash his feet said, "Never" and a moment later said, "Not my feet only, but also my head and my hands." Jesus if I need washing let's do it right.

The stage has been set for us, the disciples are with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, they are his closest friends, and they have been together for 3 years, ministering alongside of him. They have just eaten together where Jesus tells them that one of them will betray him and remember they all ask, "Is it I, surely not I?" It is the same evening when Peter declares that he would die, before he would desert Jesus and yes it would only be hours later that Peter fulfilled Jesus words of desertion and denial.

In the face of force Peter is strong and motivated. According to the book of John, Peter sees the soldiers coming, his adrenalin kicks in and he whips out his own sword to match force with force. It doesn't appear that he stopped to think that he was only **one** against many and he begins swinging. He does not seem to be afraid, he had made a promise to Jesus and he was here to protect and make good on his word. And indeed he does manage to inflict pain to one and as a side note, I don't think he was aiming for the ear, I think he was going for a larger object. Jesus turns to Peter and rebukes him, telling him to put away his sword, saying, "Those who take the sword will also die by the sword" and he heals the man's ear.

I wonder what happened inside of Peter at this moment. He had promised to go with Jesus, he had said he would die with him before he betrayed him, and yet now in the face of trying to fulfill his promise, Jesus rebukes him. Did his resolve weaken?

The disciples deserted Jesus. We aren't told if they left together, but somehow John and Peter come back and follow at a distance. This was after all their leader, they had invested so much of their lives in what he taught, how could they just leave him? As Peter followed did he think about what Jesus had said to him about being the "rock" the church would be built on? Did he

wonder what would be asked of him if indeed Jesus didn't make it out alive? What would become of the church? What would become of him and what was to become of the band of disciples?

Peter and John followed all the way into the courtyard of the high priest. While we may be critical of Peter following at a distance instead of right next to Jesus, let's remember he was still following - he was still on the move, even coming into enemy territory. He was warming himself by the same fire the guards were - most likely some of the same ones that had come for Jesus. What was he thinking? Was he in some way still trying to fulfill the promise of dying with Jesus? He did not know what would transpire that evening. He had put himself in a very vulnerable place, but he had followed, he was there, he didn't desert. As Seth Godin says, "The cost of being wrong is less than the cost of doing nothing."

And here is where Peter stumbles. Remember he had been strong in the face of force in the garden, he was prepared to fight for Jesus, but now here in front of the fire, taking comfort in its warmth, a servant girl's statement does him in.

LET'S LISTEN AGAIN TO THIS PART OF THE STORY. CLOSE YOUR EYES AND PUT YOURSELF IN PETER'S SANDLES.                      Let it be your story. (may want to hear it twice)

**Mark 14:66-72 with rooster crowing and man weeping. (PAUSE)**

Can you feel the despair, the shame, the pain that Peter felt? Can you remember a time of great shame and pain? A time when you desperately wished you could change or erase what you had done.

While this was a failure on Peter's part - he who had just declared his allegiance to Jesus to the point of death, in an unguarded moment denied being one of his disciples to a servant girl. He was caught off guard, blurting out an answer without thinking. He must have been tired, it was late, and it had been a long day. While this doesn't excuse him it brings understanding for him. In the garden he knew what he was about and he stood ready, but in the face of being found out, unprepared, he lied, and then lied again and yet again, cursing along with it. He had been backed into a corner and he felt trapped. Peter had gone from a **participant** in the garden where he knew what he was about, to an **observer** in the courtyard where he just wanted some comfort. He had let his guard down. But I don't believe it was Peter's faith that failed I believe it was his courage.

Just as I could not declare my child a coward when they lied, I cannot declare Peter a coward. I think I can declare him weak and vulnerable at this moment, struggling with the same realities we struggle with. My guess is if he had been with Jesus in front of the high priest he would have declared his loyalty to Jesus and declared it boldly.

Peter leaves the scene but not before he gazes into the eyes of Jesus, who knew what he had done. In those eyes I believe Peter felt all the love and acceptance of the master and it pierced his heart and did the only thing that seemed appropriate. He wept bitterly.

No defenses, just tears of repentance. The man who lived boldly had sinned boldly and then he repented boldly.

This failure of Peter's does not define who he was. While it was a failure, it is a chapter in his life's story. He was a man who needed forgiveness; he was a man that needed love and

understanding. He was a man who was about his life's calling. He is you and he is me. Yes he is still "the rock," it may have crumbled a bit in those moments but it was restored and became a more solid rock. My guess is that in that fateful betrayal Peter learned more about himself and Jesus than he could have learned any other way. His ministry and life took on an authenticity not because of success but because of failure.

Peter is restored, he is renewed and in the scriptures that follow we see Jesus coming to Peter with the question, "Do you love me?" The question comes three times and the answer is a profound "YES." And Jesus commissions him "Feed my Sheep." A trust that is now bound by testing. Jesus does not remind Peter of his failure, Jesus knew Peter for who he was, strong, bold & commanding but also vulnerable, open and authentic.

I am Peter, you are Peter, and the one who we have denied again and again looks at us with love and compassion and does not reject us because we are weak, but holds us close because we belong to him. We have been called, we have failed, we have been forgiven, and we have been commissioned.

Your failures, my failures are not what define us, God defines us. What we do with those failures makes all the difference. Judas's failure ended in death, Peter's in forgiveness, acceptance and usefulness. Peter was able to look into the eyes of Jesus and receive grace, a grace that would propel him to be the rock that he had been called to.

May we look into the eyes of Jesus and know, really know that nothing can separate us from his love.

May it be so.