

Growth through the eyes of Peter
(7th in a 7 sermon series)
Matthew 26: 30-35, Luke 24:1-12, John 21:15-19, Acts 4:8-12
Easter Sunday March 23, 2008

Easter is here! This is the single most important celebration for those who believe in the resurrected Messiah. The Holiness of Trinity or Christ the King Sunday, the excitement of Pentecost or Palm Sunday, the meaningful seasons of Advent or Lent and the magic of Christmas all pale in comparison to importance of Easter. Because of Easter all of our days of worship become *extra* holy days. Today we will engage in a short examination, not of the Savior, but of a fiery, floundering and predictably flawed fisherman who, with his brother, became a disciple of Jesus; Shimon "Keipha" Bar-Yonah. That is, Simon son of Jonah who Jesus renames Cephas, or Peter. Peter is just like many of us. He is a hard working, married man who receives a call that changes his life. John's gospel tells us that his brother Andrew, already a disciple of John the Baptist, tells Peter about the coming of the Messiah and they both drop their nets and follow him. This is the beginning of Peter's growth...

I remember it as clearly as if it was yesterday...This man, Jesus, who I'd never seen before, looked me straight in the eyes and said, "Come, follow me!" So I did. I know what your thinking, how'd you know everything would be ok, why didn't you consult your wife, and so on, but I just had this feeling. I really can't describe it. I guess the best way to make you understand is to think in my terms. I am a fisherman by trade. When I was out on that boat, with my brother and others, I had something of a special talent for knowing where all the fish were, I could sense it. In the same way then, when I met Jesus for the first time I had a deep sense that this was a man like no other, someone to learn from, someone to follow, and someone to live for...but then I'm getting a bit ahead of myself. The first thing Jesus told me was that I would have a new name, Cephas; which is kind of humorous really. It would be like the most irresponsible of you being renamed, "trustworthy", at the time Jesus gave me the new name, I was no rock, I was far from it!

Peter is being quite honest here, the NIV study Bible says, “Jesus named (Peter) not for what he was but for what, by God’s grace, he would become.”¹ How true is this for us? My name Nathan means “given of God”. There are many days that I feel like anything but a gift. It’s humbling to be trusted with much when you know that you have your hands full with little. As Christians each one of us, no matter how gifted or seamlessly smart we think we are, are still nothing in comparison with God. However, when we submit to God our faithfulness transforms every aspect of our being. If we are smart to begin with we gain a different kind of intellect, if we are arrogant we become humbled, if we are weak we gain strength, if we are misguided we gain vision, if we are useless we gain purpose, if we are lost we are found, if we are hurt we gain healing, if we are deceitful we become faced with the truth.

*Faced with the truth, that’s putting it mildly! Only minutes after we had broken the bread and drank from the cup, Jesus clearly prepared me for the awful outcome. He said, “This very night, before the rooster crows...you will disown me three times.” Three times! I still remember thinking, how could he be so wrong?! I wished for nothing less than putting my life on the line and yet, and yet, well you know the rest of the story. I don’t know what got into me I was so loyal, so trustworthy so... human. I followed him as the guards took him away, I didn’t want to miss a thing but as I was taking it all in, the questions came, seemingly from every side of me! “You were with him”, said a girl, “you **are** one of them” said another, and “you, the one from Galilee, you **did** know him”. Of course I knew him, I loved him, but in ignorance and fear, I said the first thing that came to my mind...*

How often does this happen to us? The more I learn about the demands of fatherhood I think some of the most helpful parenting my Dad displayed were the words that remained *unspoken*. The best advice for those of us who tend to say the first thing that comes to our minds may be simply to take a deep breath and think before we speak. How many arguments, hurt feelings or miss understandings could be avoided if we just kept our minds ahead of our mouths! Passion, frustration and weariness are lame excuses for lack of restraint. This is something Peter learned the hard way.

¹ (p1592) text note on John 1:42

*You can say that again, but then there was that mad dash to the tomb! I'll never forget how that felt! My heart was pounding...almost as quickly as my feet were moving...it's not easy to sprint in sandals you know?! I had to check it out there was just something about the way that the women spoke of their encounter with the angels...I had that sense **again**, this was no tall tale, this could be...well amazing! When I got to the tomb, I saw it as they had described it. The stone was moved, the linen clothes were left behind and the body...was gone! I have to admit, for some time I looked around for his body hoping the women hadn't overlooked a gruesome and disrespectful detail...his exposed corpse. As I looked I couldn't help but wonder... What if what Jesus had said, "What is written about me is reaching its fulfillment", meant, truly meant...that. Of course I had hoped it was true all along but... there was always this doubt in the back of my mind that it was really well, true.*

Can we relate? New York City Presbyterian pastor Timothy Keller who was recently documented in a Time magazine article says, "A faith without some doubts is like a human body without antibodies in it. People who blithely go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing question of a smart skeptic."² Peter was no skeptic but he was human. Our human-centered world is one that often asks for reason, logic or scientific theory to define proof. Sure, the men, like Peter, who walked with Jesus before and after his resurrection could have spoken to this requirement however, within time even the people who experience miracles, forget the validity of every day values, don't they? How many people who experience it doubt that childbirth is anything other than a miracle? And yet, within very little time some foolish Fathers and Mothers subject their "little miracles" to all manner of evils. Who doubts that finding a soul-mate in the midst of millions of people is anything less than phenomenal? Sadly however, over time over half of our marriages end in divorce. Who disagrees that financial security is difficult to obtain? Even so, how quickly do those of us who had so little as young people become so attached to our worldly wealth as mature adults? Before you are too hard on Peter's doubts consider your own inconsistencies.

² **The Reason for God** *Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, Dutton pub. 2008 (P xvi)

*How true, even the best among us, need a come to Jesus moment every now and then! Mine occurred not long after Jesus proved even my seasoned fish catching senses wrong. We had fished all night, and then a man simply told us to try again-his way-and wouldn't you know it...our nets were busting with fish, too heavy even for all of us muscular fishermen to pull in. That's when the depth of my spiritual growth began. As we struggled to collect our catch it dawned on me, I had that sense again, maybe we can't do it all on our own, maybe, just maybe we need others...And as I looked out toward the shore I realized...it was no common man that had given us direction, it was him, it was him! After we made it to shore and shared some of our fish for breakfast we all sat there painfully quiet as we ate. Until he broke the silence... "Simon, Do you **truly** love me" ...How many times did he have to say it, he must have repeated himself four times before I got it...he was reinstating me into his service...He was giving me ,Simon Peter, another chance!*

How often do we feel like we need a second, third or fourth chance at it? Jesus knows, Jesus cares and Jesus heals, not all at once, not always the way we intend for it, but Jesus saves us...from more than any pains we may have caused or experienced in this life. Jesus asks us "Do you love me" and we have to answer. Some of us answer by not answering, some run from the call, others let sin torment them until they are too twisted to see a way out, still others pray for a miracle but have no faith that it will take place, and then there's a few, a diminishing sort, that take the time to say; yes, I love you Lord, help me as utterly unlovely as I am, direct me when I wander astray, correct me when I become too busy to care about...anyone other than myself, and never lose hope in me...even though I don't deserve it.

Why was it so hard for me to follow him, truly follow him? I don't know, I guess I've always been something of a selfish man but ironically it wasn't until I let someone else have the full lordship of my life that I realized what my purpose was. That sense I've talked about became stronger and stronger over time and eventually something happened. The more aware I was of its divine design the easier it became to boldly respond and confidently claim that Jesus,, the one who was raised from the dead, calls all people, Jew and Gentile alike to him. This changes everything and I pray, on this Easter morning, that it changes you too!

