**Simon Peter, Confidence, denial and love**

Peter was a fisherman by trade. He lived in Bethsaida by the Sea of Galilee also known as Lake Tiberius, a freshwater lake in Israel. His father’s name was John, and his brother was Andrew. We know he was married and that Jesus healed his mother-in-law while she was sick in bed with a fever.

Peter was one of the first people to follow Jesus, being introduced to Jesus by his brother Andrew. Andrew told Simon he had found the Messiah or Christ in the Greek language. This indicates that the brothers, like many devout Jews of the time were waiting for the Messiah to come. Upon meeting Jesus, Simon Peter followed him immediately.

Peter’s birth name was Simon son of John, but Jesus gave him the name Cephus, which means “rock” in Aramaic, the language most scholars agree Jesus spoke. When the New Testament was written the language used was the then common or “koine” dialect of Greek that was spoken throughout the Roman empire. In Greek the word for “rock” is Petros, therefore in the New Testament, he is most often referred to as Petros or in English Peter.

The name Jesus gave Simon is quite significant. Jesus confirms the reason for giving him this name after Peter confesses Jesus is ***“the Christ, the Son of the living God***” (Matt 16:16, NKJV). Jesus tells Simon that this confession of faith is the rock upon which he will build the church. Simon’s faith is this rock, therefore Jesus calls him Rock or Peter.

Peter had a deep respect for Jesus and what Jesus said. After preaching on the side of the lake while sitting in Peter’s boat, Jesus instructed Peter to put out into deep water and let down the nets. Peter and his fellow fishermen had been fishing all night and not caught a thing. Nevertheless, Peter calling Jesus master, respects his word and goes out and puts down the nets, simply because Jesus asked. The result was a catch so big that they filled two boats so full that they began to sink. Peter suddenly realises he is the presence of God. He falls on his knees as he becomes aware of his own sinfulness in the presence of Jesus' holiness. Referring to Jesus as Lord he says, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8 NIV).

Jesus comforts Peter telling him not to be afraid because he has important work for Peter to do. The same Lord who had demonstrated his power in the catch of fish, now wants Peter to catch people for the kingdom.

We too as followers of Jesus are called to catch people. We too have Jesus with us and on our side. Jesus is on our side in our calling because it is his mission and his deep desire that all people would come to know him and confess him to be the Christ the Son of the living God.

Following Jesus and having faith in Jesus does not mean you will lead a perfect life. Peter certainly shows us how human and imperfect he is. One moment Jesus is naming him Peter because his faith is solid as a rock, and the next Jesus is calling him Satan.

Perhaps Peter was expecting a victorious entry into Jerusalem, ousting of the Roman overlords and the inauguration of a new eternal kingdom. Jesus was talking about suffering and death and some strange talk about rising on the third day. Peter is horrified. This can never happen to Jesus. If this could happen to Jesus, what will happen to his disciples? Peter rebukes Jesus and Jesus calls him Satan, because he is not thinking about God’s plans but his own.

We too can find ourselves getting it wrong. Even though we are disciples of the king of the universe doesn’t mean things will always go smoothly for us. Following Jesus can result in difficulties in our lives, even suffering, as the millions of persecuted Christians around the world know only too well.

Peter’s greatest moment of failure came when Jesus was arrested and on trial. Full of confidence Peter had told Jesus he would never deny him and was fully prepared to die with him. Still full of confidence Peter even drew his sword and cut off the ear of the High priest’s servant when Jesus was arrested.

Peter was resolute but Jesus knew how powerful fear can be and told Peter that he would deny him three times before the rooster crowed. In telling Peter this Jesus was helping to prepare Peter for what lay ahead. When the time came Peter’s confidence fell apart. Filled with fear he denied Jesus three times and the rooster crowed. Catching Jesus’ eye across the courtyard, Peter wept bitterly. It seems that no matter how resolute you are and how confident you are that you will live your life according to your principles, in the face of unexpected challenges, stress and fear can get hold of you and derail your best intentions.

Even though bitterly disappointed with himself, Peter stuck with his fellow disciples as they supported one another after Jesus had died. On the day of resurrection, When Mary came back from the tomb saying Jesus wasn’t in it, Peter was one of two disciples who ran there to investigate.

Sometime later Jesus appeared again while Peter and several other disciples were fishing in Lake Tiberius. Having caught nothing, Jesus called out from the shore telling them to cast the net on the other side of the boat. Once again there was a huge catch of fish. Suddenly Peter realised that it was Jesus on the shore, jumped into the water and went to him. The disciples had breakfast with Jesus and then Jesus spoke to Peter.

On Good Friday Peter had denied Jesus three times. There is no record of Jesus ever judging Peter for his denial. Instead on the lakeshore, Jesus talks about what is most important to him. Jesus knows human beings will often fail, but the most important thing is not our failures. The most important thing is the relationship we have with Jesus. Do we trust Jesus, and therefore experience his love? Do we in turn respond with love for Jesus?

On the lakeshore, Jesus talks about love.

Three times he asks Peter. “Do you love me?” Peter replies yes, yes Lord. Look in my heart Lord you know that I love you. With love for Christ, the Son of the living God, Peter has the mindset and love he needs to do the work Jesus has set aside for him to do. That work is to feed the sheep of the great shepherd and Lord, Jesus.

Peter loved Jesus and he dedicated his life to feeding his sheep, becoming a leader in the young church. In the end, he did die for his Lord a cruel death, exactly as Jesus told him he would, with his arms outstretched, dressed by his executioners and lead to a place he did not want to go. He followed Jesus to the very end and even in death glorified God.

**Amen.**

**Pastor Rolf Lungwitz**