

Flawed yet Faithful Disciples

Luke 22:54-62 and John 21:1-17

Sunday, April 28, 2019

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Madison WI

Rev. Charlie Berthoud

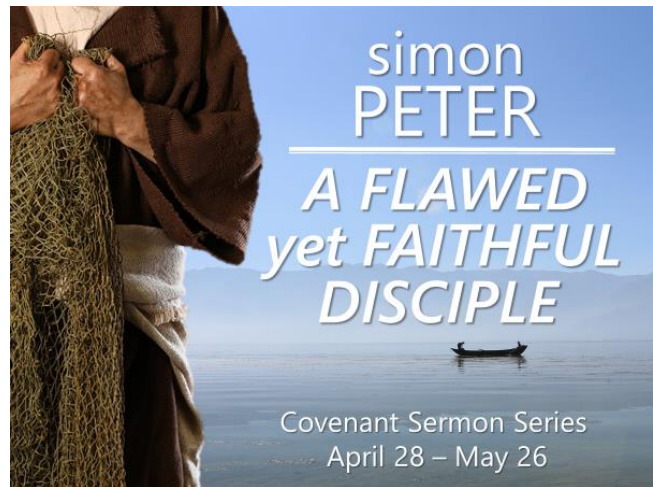
Happy Easter!

Today is the second Sunday of Easter. After the joyful celebration last week with lots of flowers, and special music, and Easter dinners, now we really dig in and try to figure out what this Good News and this idea of following Jesus is all about.

So we're beginning a five week series looking at Peter, arguably the most known leader of the first disciples of Jesus.

Our series is called Flawed but Faithful, named after a sermon series by Adam Hamilton, a Methodist pastor and author who I greatly admire, based in Kansas City. My hope is that by looking a little more deeply at the life of the disciple Peter, we can learn about being disciples today.

Our readings for today are two of the most dramatic scenes in the gospel involving Peter.



You just heard how Peter denied Jesus three times, after having pledged to never deny him.

Peter's denial appears in all four gospels—reflecting how strong a memory it was for the early church.

After the denial Peter and the rest of that first group of disciples basically disappear from the scene. They are nowhere to be found at the trial, crucifixion, and death of Jesus. Instead we see several women and other lesser known male disciples.

After the resurrection, Peter and the other original disciples begin to reappear.

What follows is one of several resurrection narratives, and many of them involve food, as we heard last week in Luke 24, on the road to Emmaus, where Jesus ate bread with Cleopas and his companion.

Here, several of the disciples are fishing, and they join Jesus for a meal on the beach.

A few interesting notes:

- The text mentions a charcoal fire. The only other mention of a charcoal fire in the gospels is just a few chapters previously, when Peter is warming his hands, just before his first denial of Jesus.
- Many people are intrigued by the specific mention of 153 fish. There are many interesting ideas about the symbolism of this number. St. Augustine noted that if you add all the numbers from 1 to 17, you get 153. And if you add the 10 Commandments and 7 gifts of the Spirit, you get 17.
- Most significant is to remember that Peter had denied Jesus three times, so it's probably not a coincidence that Jesus asks Peter a question three times, to help Peter get back on track as a disciple.

Listen for God's word.

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast."

¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to

him, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

The Bible tells us that Jesus had twelve disciples. But they don’t all get equal time.

Most of them are only mentioned a few times, mostly in lists.

John and Andrew are mentioned about 20 times.

Peter is mentioned about 120 times.

He is right there in the beginning, when Jesus proclaims the Kingdom and calls four fishermen to join him.

Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon [Peter] and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed Jesus.

--Mark 1:14-18

But Peter didn’t always do a good job as a follower, a disciple.

Later, Peter is one of the disciples that Jesus brings up on a mountain, for the transfiguration. Peter feels the need to talk and do something, rather than just experience it.

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white....

Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said.

--Luke 9

Then, according to Matthew 16, Jesus affirms Peter as the Rock, the one on whom the church will be built, but then Peter misunderstands what Jesus' mission is all about, and just a verse later, Jesus calls him a stumbling block.

Jesus said, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."

Then Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

--Matthew 16

And then of course you heard about Peter denying Jesus.

But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter.

Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And Peter went out and wept bitterly.

--Luke 22

After these and other blunders, we could understand if Jesus decided to go back to the want ads or to Monster.com to find some new disciples.

But he didn't.

He was patient and clear with Peter, giving him second chances.

He "reinstates" Peter with the three questions, changing the imagery from fishing to shepherding, encouraging Peter to take care of the sheep, i.e. love people.

And as we see in the book of Acts, the account of the early church, Peter seems to get it, making progress as a faithful disciple, becoming a powerful preacher and inspirational leader in the church.

Peter gives us an example of growth and transformation.

As I think about Peter stumbling and bumbling along with Jesus, I remember my freshman year of college, when I was involved with a Christian fellowship group. I enjoyed being a participant in small group Bible studies.

One week, I accidentally walked in on the leadership meeting. I tried to make a graceful and quick exit, but they interpreted my presence as a sign from God that I should be one of the small group discussion leaders that week.

I did not agree with their theological interpretation of my accidentally walking into their meeting. But I did it. I was terrified.

We read the Bible verse and I asked the first question, with my voice literally trembling. When no one answered after a few seconds—no one ever speaks up immediately in such groups—I went to the second question.

Fortunately, a sophomore named Doug jumped in and gently helped guide the discussion. Afterwards, he told me what a great job I did, offering some suggestions.

Looking back, it's funny to me now, that I was so uncomfortable, sitting in a group of friends, with a list of questions.

I'm grateful that God doesn't give up on us.

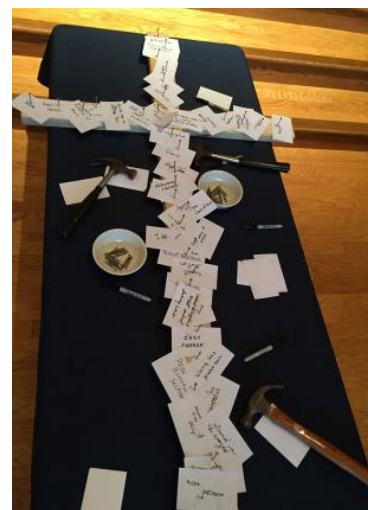
I'm grateful that God is persistent.

I pray that we can be persistent in our efforts to be faithful disciples.

As disciples, we are called to turn away from sin and welcome the new life. This is a lifelong process.

On Good Friday, we gathered here and I invited people to think about sin in the personal life or in our lives together.

- Impatience, pride, selfishness
- Arrogance, anger, inaction, apathy
- Walk with Jesus, not my own way
- Thy will not mine.
- Heal racism
- Welcome LGBT people
- Accumulation of material things
- Be a better neighbor, especially right next door
- Worry less; praise more.



God offers forgiveness and renewal

We do what we can to welcome this offer and live into the new life.

Today we welcome 9 new disciples, new members through our Confirmation Class.

They're not perfect. But they're here to take this big step on the faith journey, to continue to process becoming a more faithful disciple, a more loving, God-centered person.

That's what we're all doing: Learning and Living

About 15 years ago, I went on a pastor retreat in Nashville, at a beautiful conference center. As you walk in, there is a stone archway, with the words:

Expect great things from God

It wasn't until a few days later I noticed that when you leave, on the opposite side of the archway, you see the words:

Attempt great things for God.

That's the same sort of thinking we have here at Covenant, with our emphasis on learning and living.

Every time we come to church or really every day, we could have the attitude: What can I learn today? And then we take what we learn and put it into practice, asking: How will I live this week?

We are flawed, imperfect disciples. But God has not and will not give up on us. God leads us forward together to grow in faithfulness.

Let us pray.