

Jesus Reinstates Peter (John 21:15-25)

I wonder which of the disciples you identify with:

Andrew – eager to tell others about Jesus

Thomas – the realist who wants hard evidence

Judas – weaknesses for worldly things momentarily took priority over Jesus

Matthew – not really a natural fit, felt as though he didn't belong

Peter – enthusiastic Christian but perhaps a little arrogant and often put his foot in it

There's something about Peter that I really love. There's something about him that I find so refreshing. He amuses me, I mean when you read about some of Peter's adventures and what he gets up to it's just so funny. He tends to act first and then think about what he's doing in the middle of it. He's not always the brightest disciple but you have to admire his infectious enthusiasm. Take a look at the passage immediately before our passage for this evening. Here the disciples had had a rotten night of fishing (or at least sitting in a boat dipping their nets in and out of the water). They caught nothing all night. The worst night's fishing ever (assuming it's not possible to get worse than nothing). And then at the first light of day a man standing on the beach calls to them and suggests that they try the other side. If I was in their shoes I don't think I would have been too impressed with this suggestion but they give it a try anyway and suddenly find that they have a result. Loads of fish! The worst night's fishing ever turns into the best night's fishing ever. At this point John realises it is the Lord and turns to Peter, "it's the Lord!" I love this next bit:

As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ^[b]

Immediately, without even thinking about it, Simon Peter puts his clothes back on and jumps in the water and swims the 100 yards to the shore where Jesus is. Notice that he leaves the other disciples to struggle with the fish, that seems to have completely vanished from his mind in his excitement to see Jesus.

Peter was also a man of great faith. On another occasion when the disciples were out in the boat at night, Jesus came walking on the lake. (Matthew 14:25-33)

²⁵During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

³¹Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Peter often gets a lot of stick for doubting but let's not forget that he had the courage to get out of the boat in the first place. I mean be honest, faced with the same situation, would you have gotten out of the boat? If you were in a boat on the sea and Jesus said to you, "come on then", would you have the faith to actually step out on to the water? I don't mean just jump into the water and swim to Jesus, would you have the faith that you could walk on the water? I think that takes a lot of faith. But again, Peter acts impulsively and then seems to think about what he's actually doing later.

Peter does get it right sometimes though. He was the first disciple to recognise who Jesus really was. (Matthew 16:13-20)

¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ,^[b] the Son of the living God."

¹⁷Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter,^[c] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades^[d] will not overcome it.^[e] ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be^[f] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^[g] loosed in heaven." ²⁰Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Peter recognised that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God. And at the point Jesus gives him a new name, no longer Simon son of Jonah, now Peter, the rock. It's interesting isn't it that Peter recognises Jesus as someone different, not just a great teacher or a prophet but Peter says "You are the Christ" and Jesus replies "and you are Peter".

So we get a picture of this strong disciple. A passionate follower of Jesus, a close friend, someone who is really committed and loyal.

Peter is very confident about his commitment to Jesus and even perhaps a little big headed about it. (Matthew 26:33-35)

³¹Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

" I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."^[c] ³²But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

³³Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."

³⁴"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."

³⁵But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

Peter first of all says that even if all the others fall away, he never will. He will never leave Jesus no matter what happens, even if he's the only one left, he's so confident that he will never fall away. But Jesus knows Peter and Jesus knows that on that very night Peter will deny knowing him. But

even when Jesus tells him this, he still refuses to hear it. "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." But we know that that night Jesus' prediction was spot on. Under pressure, Peter denied three times that he even knew Jesus. Far from being the last one to fall away, he was one of the first. Far from being prepared to die with Jesus, when he knew that Jesus was in trouble, he feared for his life and disassociated himself with Jesus. When the cock crowed Peter remembered Jesus' words and he went outside and wept bitterly.

That event must have haunted Peter in the days that followed. As he watched Jesus being whipped and beaten, as he watched the nails being driven into his hands and feet, as he stood and watched Jesus dying as he hung on the cross. And Peter still had to live with the guilt that when Jesus most needed a friend, he had let him down. All the bold claims he had made and when it came to the crunch, he was not able to live up to them. What a heavy heart Peter must have had when Jesus died.

But Peter's enthusiasm for Jesus was not dampened and neither was Jesus' love for Peter. You see, our Lord is the Lord of second chances. And Peter was about to get a second chance. The disciples had enjoyed breakfast together, barbequed fish on the beach. It makes your mouth water just thinking about it doesn't it. Fresh fish, only just pulled out of the lake and put straight on the barbeque. Anyway, after this time of fellowship Jesus addresses Peter on a one to one basis.

"Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

Notice that Jesus uses Peter's old name 'Simon son of John'. Is this an indication perhaps that Peter had let some of his old self creep back in? 'Simon' means 'shifting sands' as apposed to 'Peter' meaning 'the rock'. So you can see why Jesus gave him a new name. But maybe Jesus was addressing the fact that on that night in Jerusalem, Peter had been more like shifting sands than a rock despite his bold claims to the contrary. Perhaps Peter himself is still bothered by this and Jesus knows that he is still bothered by it.

Jesus counters Peter's three times of denial by asking him to state three times that he loves him. I think this is more for Peter's benefit than for Jesus but Peter is still hurt at Jesus' asking him three times. It seemed somehow that Jesus was unsatisfied with Peter's response. The third time Peter replies is slightly different. He says "Lord you know all things, you know that I love you." By stressing that Jesus knows all things shows that Peter believed Jesus knew his heart and that he really meant what he said.

Each time Peter replies "yes Lord, you know that I love you" Jesus gives him a commission.

1. Feed my lambs = spiritual nourishment of new believers
2. Take care of my sheep = pastoral care to all believers
3. Feed my sheep = spiritual nourishment for all believers

Peter was not useless, not a spent force. Now he had been restored, the past dealt with and used for good. Now what emerged was a new Peter. A better Peter. He had had some of his rough edges smoothed away. Because of his experience he had been stripped of his pride, he was less arrogant and a little less impulsive.

Jesus knew now that Peter really would follow him to the end. Now Peter really was ready to say "I will never fall away on account of you" Now he was ready to say "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." For Peter, these were not just words, Jesus explained that it was important that Peter meant it because he would glorify God by acting on his words.

¹⁸ I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

Jesus knew that Peter had changed and really would follow him to the end.

Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Do you identify with Peter? Are there times when some of your old self creeps back in? Are there times when you have chosen to hide the fact that you are a disciple of Jesus? Are there things from the past that haunt you that you still haven't dealt with before God?

God is a God who can change us on the inside, He is able and willing to forgive all our failings, and he can heal the hurts of the past. Let's come to him in prayer now.