

“THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SIMON PETER”

Matthew 14:28-31

March 5, 2017

First Sunday in Lent

Matthew 14:28-31 (The Message)

²⁸ Peter, suddenly bold, said, “Master, if it’s really you, call me to come to you on the water.”

²⁹⁻³⁰ He said, “Come ahead.”

Jumping out of the boat, Peter walked on the water to Jesus. But when he looked down at the waves churning beneath his feet, he lost his nerve and started to sink. He cried, “Master, save me!”

³¹ Jesus didn’t hesitate. He reached down and grabbed his hand. Then he said, “Faint-heart, what got into you?”

Beginning with this First Sunday in Lent, I will be exploring with you the experiences of the disciples and close followers of Jesus as they journey with him to Jerusalem and to the fate that awaits him there. You should understand at the outset that there is little to no factual source material about these persons that is available today. Most of what we “know” about the disciples and close associates of Jesus we have pieced together from the Gospel stories and from Luke’s second book, the Book of Acts. So as I speak to you in the voice of the person chosen for

the week, be very clear that this voice is imagined rather than summarized from definitive sources. I have done my homework, but as always in my messages to you, I am looking for the ways that our sacred scripture can be made to apply meaningfully to our lives today. Thus, the “Gospel truth,” according to Simon Peter:

I am full of emotion as I tell you my story of my time with Jesus. I didn't ask to be called as his right-hand man; I was a simple fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, eeking out a meager existence for myself and my family when Jesus came to me and my brother, Andrew, and said to us, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” (Matt 4:19) What an odd thing to say to us! Yet, we did not think about what he said; it was as though we had no choice in the matter. I knew that to save my very life, I had to say, “Yes!” to this call. How odd...

Matthew, the Gospel writer, loved me from the start. When he wrote about me, I was already an angel of God, having followed my Lord in the way of the cross some 20-30 years before his story was told. But I am beholden to Matthew, because right away, he moved me to the head of the class, helping me to claim the position of leader of the disciples. Sorry, Andrew. It's tough living in the shadow of a famous brother.

Matthew wrote about my mother-in-law whom Jesus healed from a nasty fever. (8:14) He did this in my house. I had a family, and I'm not entirely proud of this, but I left them to serve my Lord. As I said, I had no choice in the matter. I also never imagined this quest of his would take me away from my loved ones for the better part of three years. It was not easy; I am sure they suffered. Nothing and no one other than this incredibly compelling man could have made me leave them. God works in such strange ways, don't you think?

Did you know that I tried to walk on water once? Have you ever tried it? It's.... impossible! I thought I was being so clever, testing Jesus. I'd witnessed all these miracles he had performed, and I was always looking behind the proverbial curtain to see how he was pulling these things off. I mean, I'd seen it all: he cured a man with leprosy after he preached the Sermon on the Mount (8:1); he cured two blind men just by touching their eyes (9:27). He made the Centurion's paralyzed servant walk again (8:5), and in spectacular fashion, he cast out demons and sent them into swine and the whole herd ran off the side of a cliff into the water below. (8:28) I couldn't speak for a long time after that one.

And so, I foolishly decided to test Jesus. If he could do all these things, surely he could make me walk on water. After all, I was his best disciple! I'd seen

him do this very thing in the morning, walking on the water. He looked like a ghost as he skirted over the waves, and we all cried out to him in fear. He said, "Take heart, it is I: do not be afraid."

But I decided to be a big shot. I said to him, "If it is really you, then make me walk on water, too." What a fool. Jesus took my test and decided to teach me a lesson. He told me to come ahead, and so I jumped out of the boat. And then I started to sink, and Jesus had to rescue me. What a blowhard I was. I learned that day to listen to him when he told us something. He didn't kid around. My mouth has always gotten me into trouble, and this time, it almost got me killed.

You'd think that Jesus would have given up on me many times over. I was always saying the wrong thing, shooting my mouth off without thinking. Like the time I was up on the mountain with Jesus and Moses and Elijah appeared with him. I was babbling on about building them monuments, and God-God no less, had to tell me to pipe down! (17:4)

Another time I argued with Jesus when he said he would soon die. I didn't want to hear his dire prediction! We needed him to stay around and to lead us. Well, Jesus got really mad at me. He called me a Satan, and told me to "get behind him," meaning to get out of his way. He rebuked me, saying, "You are a

stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” (16:23) I didn’t get what he meant by that, but I knew that because I couldn’t keep my mouth shut, I had made him angry—very angry.

Jesus then told all of us, “If any of you want to be my true followers, deny yourselves and take up your cross and follow me.” He said, “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” (16:24) As usual, I was left scratching my head. I didn’t realize at the time that I would be left as the leader of the Jesus Way after he was gone. I didn’t get it that, to get the gospel good news out I, too, would have to take up the cross.

Jesus told me this would be my one true calling in life. He called me the Rock, and that was a play on words, I guess, because my name, Peter, means “rock.” For once, I said something right. When he asked me, “Who do you say that I am?” I told him that I knew in my heart that he was the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (16:15)

Jesus knew I was serious about him. I guess he knew that I did get it as to who he was and what he was on earth to do. It was just my mouth that constantly got me into trouble. My chest swelled with pride and my breath grew short when he told me then that he would build his church on my faith and

witness. He promised me the keys to the kingdom of heaven. (16:19) I was full of joy to hear him build me up like that.

But I continued to fail him! I fell asleep when I should have stayed awake. There he was on the night of his arrest, fretting about what was going to happen to him, and I was nodding off like I didn't care about him. (26:40)

And then when I was challenged by some persistent questioners, I denied knowing him. I denied him three times, just like he said I would. (26:34) How did he know that I would do that? I was so scared. I was trying to save myself. I told him I could die with him, but when the rubber hit the road, I chickened out. I hate myself for that. I cried and I cried and I cried when I realized how I had betrayed my Lord in his hour of need.

Still, he loved me. As flawed as I am, he loved me. He told me so. Even though I failed so many times, Jesus recognized that the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. (26:40). Oh, that Jesus...he knew me and he loved me anyway.

You may have a hard time believing this, but I saw Jesus again, after the Romans crucified him and we had buried him. Yes, I did. I saw him again. He was living again! He was standing right in front of me and the others, telling us to go

and tell our story and spread the good news far and wide. (28:16) And so, I am telling you this and you can believe it:

You need not fear death. Jesus has paved the way for all to gain eternal life. He came back to assure us of this. He came back to make sure we would not let his message die, that we would make sure others heard it. He came back to build a church upon a rock, and that rock was me. At first it was me, and then it was all of us who knew him, and then it was countless others who heard his story and his message of love and justice, mercy and compassion. Now, it is you; you are the rock upon which Christ's church continues to be built. You are the ones commissioned to spread the good news.

Christ's love was the key that opened the door to the kingdom of heaven. So, when you think of me, think of my heart, and not just of my mouth. My heart was in the right place, even when my mouth got me into trouble. When you think of my journey, realize that you, too, can lay down your nets and go fishing for people. It doesn't take special training; it just takes a willing spirit.

And when you think of my Gospel, think of all the magical and mystical things Jesus said and did, of all the people he healed and all the people he fed and

all the people he changed. Most of all, know that the best thing Jesus did for us all was to teach us about God's unconditional love for the Creation. Jesus brought God right into our livingrooms, right into our own hearts and minds, right into our souls. Be like Jesus, and be love, justice, compassion and mercy in the world. Follow him and be fishers of people.

May it be so.