

WANDERING HEART: FIGURING OUT FAITH WITH PETER¹

Philippians 2:5-11 ~ John 12:12-16

"Songs of Loudest Praise"

Palm/Passion Sunday ~ March 24, 2024

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Sermon

I have to tell you. Of course, you've probably figured it out by now: I, Peter, am a person who thinks out loud. The nick name "Peter" *still* makes me smirk. I was born with the name "Simon" until Jesus renamed me "Peter" (from the Greek word *petra* for stone). No one, I mean no one, ever thought of me as a rock solid *anything* before Jesus came along.

Honestly, I have more mood swings in one hour than most people do in a month. Especially *now*. I have to tell you: Just when I think I'm starting to get it, Jesus confounds me, again. He is not the Messiah I was ever imagining. His actual story is so different. And these last few days, I have to say, it seems like things are spinning out of control. Way out. Before I catch you up on the latest, it's making me think back to how this all got started.

Back in the beginning, he had me at "Go fish." Seriously, the day we met, was when he said fish and we got some. A crazy catch of fish. You know, the time when we got so many fish in our nets that they began to break. After an entire night of catching not even one lousy stinking fish! Just then, Jesus appears and tells us to put down our nets one more time. Right when we were ready to go home and crash. But we did let down our nets that one more time, because we were desperate. I think I knew right then; my life would never be the same. I had to follow this guy. Wherever he was going to take us.

And then there was the next never before thing. The day when I started to walk out to Jesus on the water (obviously didn't think that one through) and quickly started sinking, I got scared, really scared. Then Jesus literally took me by the hand and saved me. Yup: he Hosanna'd me. Right in front of my buddies. Rescued me. I don't know. One day he is saving my bacon, and the next day he is teaching us to do hard things, impossible things. You know: like forgiving the same person seventy-seven times. Really. Come on, enough is enough. Isn't there some point where you have to draw the line? Right? Be reasonable, Jesus. We're only human.

But then, so is he. And he is teaching us a different story. A truer and stranger story about life and love. And it's nothing like the violent and vengeful world I know. That's one of the weird things about Jesus: the more intense it gets, the more peaceful and focused, and he becomes. Doesn't he know he's pushing up the timetable, accelerating this horrible ending he keeps predicting? You may recall, the first time he told us that he had to go to Jerusalem, undergo great suffering, be killed, and raised on the third day, I was about to punch him out to knock some sense into him. That's what good friends do, right? But then Jesus, my Lord, rebuked me! Not with his fist, of course. But with his face and voice. Believe me: that was worse. He even called me Satan. Told me to get out of his face, out of his way. The way he *must* fulfil his destiny.

I never had doubts about his power. But I wondered about his timing and his judgment. Especially how he raised Lazarus from the dead. I mean we all knew he really liked Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha of Bethany. They were good friends. But then why did he wait until Lazarus had been dead already for four days? You should have seen Martha: she was furious at him for waiting so long after they had sent word *before* he died, back when he was ill. Confounding? Yes! Instead, he had the stone removed from his tomb four days later, called to him, "Lazarus, come out!" And Lazarus, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth, came out of that tomb. Who does that? Especially when he knew the religious authorities who were threatened by his rising popularity had already tried to stone him to death.

Just yesterday, six days before Passover, we went back to Bethany, to hang out with the recently raised Lazarus again, and his sisters Martha and Mary. Martha is a really great cook. So that was all good: Jesus got to hang with his Bethany friends again and we got some really good grub. But then things got weird *again*. Right at the dinner table, Mary took this crazy expensive perfume made of pure nard, boy does that spikenard stuff smell. The aroma is overpowering. And the next thing we knew, she was anointing Jesus' feet with tons of it and then started using her hair to wipe it off his feet. (Kind of put me right off my dinner.)

Sure enough, tight wad Judas pipes up about how wasteful Mary was to spend her money on the Nard, but Jesus *defended* her. Jesus said she was doing the *right* thing. He explained that she was anointing his feet, anticipating his death and burial. Oh my God, not that "I'm about to be killed" talk again. None of us understood what was going on at that point. Except maybe Mary of Bethany. It was uncanny how tuned in she seemed to be to Jesus. Even when he got weird on us. But hey, I'm just a fisherman. What do I know?

So now today, five days before the Passover, Jesus (and the rest of us) entered Jerusalem from the East. We went down from the Mount of Olives. Dread silenced us, all the way down to our sandals. But surprise surprise: the crowd grabbed palm branches and started shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" when they saw Jesus. And what does he do? Finds a *donkey* to ride! Really? Come on Jesus. I'm losing it again. This is embarrassing..

A donkey?? What is that supposed to mean? Do you really have to keep teaching us new and confounding lessons? Even today? Please, no. Not this way. Out in public, so exposed. Can't we avoid the political for once? Or better yet: why can't you be the political warrior king on a stallion, poised to annihilate the armies of their Roman overlords? I know you could if had a mind to. Come on Jesus, use that amazing power, dazzle us. Show the world what you've got. I know you love underdogs. But you can fight for the underdogs—by force. With you being God and all, we can definitely win big time! We can fight stronger and more violently. Doesn't might makes right? Let our swords do the talking. I have my weapons, I am ready. That's what I'm fixed on!

Did you see the extravagant parade of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor over at the Jaffa Gate on the other side of town? How can we compete with that? Pilate, with his imperial cavalry and soldiers, armed to the teeth. Just look at that grand procession, crowned with laurels, riding a chariot, pulled by white horses proceeding to the temple to offer sacrifices. The power of empire for all to see and admire. It is really something. Quite the spectacle. They are singing to Tiberius, the Roman emperor, they believe he's the Son of God.

Two parades, two sons of God: This is not going to end well. Jesus: Why do you have to push it this way. Riding on a borrowed donkey, not a chariot. *Jesus: you are all that and yet you choose to have none of it.* Who does this? I don't know about you, but when things get hot, I am a runner. I run from it. I run from darkness, from failure, from relapse, from death, from woundedness. But not Jesus. Maybe, just maybe he's showing us how this different story of his goes. Maybe he's showing us how darkness, failure, relapse, death, and woundedness, could actually be our best teachers. I wonder what kind of love this can be. It's definitely like nothing I've ever seen before.

I know I love him. But do I understand him? Heck no. Can I stay with him now, no matter what? I don't know. What if I fail him when he needs me most? I will never forgive myself. Will he?

ⁱ A Sanctified Art LLC/ sanctifiedart.org Lenten Theme 2024 Series.