

March 3

“RIGHTEOUS REBUKE”

When Everything Went ~~Wrong~~. Right!



Viewing Holy Week Through the Eyes of Peter

“Righteous Rebuke”

Matthew 16:21-23

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“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Special Music: “Devil”

Anne Wilson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1dh3t2F5oE>

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THE STONE

The stone in the middle of the wheat field was staggeringly huge, but John needed to remove it before he ended up breaking his plow, or possibly his tractor. Now John was a big man, stronger than most with arms as big as fence posts and muscles bulging from all the farm work he did. But regardless of his attempts, this rock had managed to get the best of him. He had tried to dig beneath it so that he could get chains around it, but it had proven to be too deep. He had attempted to just slap chains around it and pull it out with his tractor, but the chains kept slipping off and at one point he felt he might ruin the tractor's transmission. No, the stone in the middle of the field was just too large for John to deal with on his own. It was so very frustrating. He knew he had to find a way. He wracked his brains knowing that spending time dwelling on it was preventing him from getting his other chores done and it certainly was getting in the way of him getting the field plowed and planted before the rains.

Twice a week, John met a few of his friends for breakfast at The Scrub Brush Café on Main Street. He had known these men all of his life. There was Bill who ran the gas station. Max was the only plumber in town. Steve owned the resale shop on Josie Ave. Henry was the local banker. Jeff had a cattle ranch just outside of town. Big Sam owned the only grocery store in town. They had all played football together in high school and even though they had met with a few differences over the years, they always knew they could count on one another when things got difficult. There was no doubt that they had each other's backs.

So, while they were enjoying breakfast and swapping yarns about days gone by, sipping on their coffee, John decided to share his stone problem with them. Maybe one of them had a better idea. Before long they were all scratching their heads. These men all felt John's pain, but none of them had a bigger tractor or a better idea concerning how to move that despicable and stubborn rock from the field.

"You might consider talking to Dave Connors over in Rusksville," said Jeff. "You remember Dave, don't you John? He was a year behind us in high school. He owns a heavy equipment company. Maybe he could help."

"You can forget about Dave," said Max. "He passed away three months back, and his wife sold the company and went to live with her daughter in Connecticut."

Bill, being the most practical among them, quietly said, "I don't know if it will work, but you might use fire to heat the rock up and then pour ice on it. That might cause it to break up into smaller pieces, making the rock easier to move. That's what Hannibal did crossing the Alps"

"Well, there's a thought worth exploring," replied John. "I'm going to consider that."

Big Sam spoke up, "Just forget about it, John. Just let it go and plow around it. It isn't worth the trouble. Your time is much too valuable to sit around fretting about something you cannot change. Just live with it and go on."

This made John upset, bordering on anger. “I can do without your advice, Big Sam. You have no idea how much this rock is bothering me, and I can’t believe that you would take my problem so lightly. If you haven’t got anything helpful to say, why don’t you just walk away now before I get really upset. I truly thought you knew me better than that.”

Well, that took Big Sam completely off guard. He hadn’t expected that kind of reaction. He didn’t believe it was that big of a deal. It wasn’t like that rock hadn’t been there for all these years. It wasn’t something new. John’s frustration was just making it a bigger deal than it really was.

Big Sam looked at John and realized that his own insensitivity to John’s problem had just pounded a wedge into the friendship. The look that John was giving him was enough to make him reconsider having opened his mouth.

“If it’s all the same to you, Big Sam, I think I will give Bill’s plan a try,” John said through his teeth.

It was weeks before Big Sam felt guilty enough to apologize to John. All these men were more stubborn than mules. By that time, John had given Bill’s plan his best shot. To his utter amazement, it worked and he was finally able to rid the field of the rock. It took a little longer to repair the rift between John and Big Sam. John loved Big Sam like a brother, but what he had said by trivializing John’s dilemma, took time to heal. Sometimes friendships are like that. But in the end, the friendships that survive such tests usually bring tighter bonds and new perspectives into relationships.

John and Big Sam did make up, and before too long, it was like the whole thing never happened. But our mouths can get us into so much trouble. When we are talking, we aren't listening. And when do listen and have something to say, it should be something worthy of dealing with the issue rather than avoiding it. If we have something to add, we should speak up. But if what we have to say contributes nothing to the solution, we might should learn that it is best not to say anything at all. That is sign of respect in friendships and we should never forget that our friendships are far more important than our noise.

That's what happened to Peter in today's scripture. He and Jesus were more than just student and teacher. They were friends. Jesus wasn't looking for advice. He was delivering information. And Peter, God love him, just couldn't keep from saying something. His mouth engaged before his brain thought it through. And it stung Jesus to his heart as he was already dealing with the overwhelming nature of his coming crucifixion.

This Easter season we are going to be looking at Holy Week in a different light. I would like for us to see that week through the eyes of an everyman, a simple man much like us. Peter. I love Peter. He, like me, will sometimes speak before he thinks. He blurts out things at inappropriate times, expresses opinions that come without substance, leads with his heart sometimes rather than his head. And his habit of having no filters often gets him into trouble. He is so much like most of us. I don't think his disrespect is intentional, but he just doesn't think through his words before opening his mouth.

Peter is an awestruck, ordinary fisherman, who speaks his mind and lives with constant humility wondering why Jesus chose him, out of so many other people, to become one of his twelve disciples. With his simple background and ambiance of a fisherman, he must have felt somewhat out of place being chosen for such an awesome responsibility. Surely Christ could have found someone more worthy. That had to always be playing in the back of his mind, almost to distraction.

Which brings us to ask, what makes any of us so special, that God, in his infinite wisdom, would choose any one of us, sinners that we are, to be his

children? Aren't we a lot like Peter in our approach to both God and our lives? And most of us have a tendency to say the wrong thing at the wrong time at some point.

21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

Peter took him aside, much like a parent pulls a child away from everyone else to rebuke him. What was he thinking? Peter pulls at Jesus' arm and talks softly to him so that the others won't hear, "Hey Jesus, buddy, you might want to rethink what you are saying. This is not a good image for you. You probably don't want to be talking about this here. I mean, you're Jesus, man, and something like that could never happen to you so maybe you might want to tone it down a little."

23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

We seldom see Jesus get angry in the New Testament. Irritated and annoyed with the Sadducees and Pharisees, yes. But usually not angry. When Jesus rebukes the religious leaders, it is often to teach a lesson.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you Hypocrites."

A phrase found multiple times in the 23rd chapter of Matthew, as Jesus tries to point out to the religious leaders that they are teaching one thing but doing another. This is Jesus' way of trying to draw their attention to the fact that they expect everyone else to follow the law, but they seem to be exempt, simply because they are priests. But still, not anger. Accusatory, correcting, teaching, explaining, trying to open their eyes, yes. But not anger. Even though it seemed to bring out the worst in the religious leaders when Jesus rebukes them. Truth has a funny way of irritating us when we are caught in our own lies. But in those situations, it is the rebuked that become angry. Jesus is just stating facts that they don't want to have pointed out. But he isn't showing anger. It is the rebuked people who become angry for being exposed. They've had a spotlight shone on their own moral failures.

Let's be honest with ourselves. We really don't like it when this happens to us, especially if it is our employees or our children who point out our double standards. We feel like we are being forced to back pedal. And I am sure that Peter felt this way, because Jesus speaks out with an authority that would humble the most arrogant of people.

We read more of this in Matthew than the other Gospels. But even when Jesus is at the Temple turning over the tables, I have to wonder if it isn't more about exposing social injustice, rather than anger. He is pushing the point home that the vendors have forgotten the reason that they are there and turned the needs of the people into an opportunistic endeavor to gain personal wealth.

12 Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

13 “It is written,” he said to them, “ ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’”

The vendors at the temple were taking advantage of the people knowing the people were doing their best to adhere to the law by offering sacrifices. The vendors were overcharging the people for the animals and the money changers could be compared to today’s loan sharks. Still, I am not convinced that it was anger that Jesus was expressing as much as a righteous rebuke of these practices, and an outburst of frustration at the gall that they were showing by cheating people in the courts of the very temple where the people has come to worship.

But this moment that Jesus has with Peter in Matthew 16 seems be more intense that even that, almost as if Jesus has reached the limit of his patience.

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

We don’t expect to hear this from Jesus. It seems so out of character. It kind of leaps from the page. Where is the good, kind, loving, patient, warm Jesus we have come to expect when we read the New Testament?

Jesus never does anything without purpose and Jesus never loses his cool. So, this seems like something we want to just skip over because we believe

Jesus is having a moment, an existential crisis. His humanness is showing, and people are shocked. While Peter is determined to keep this on the down low, Jesus is going to make sure everyone hears what he is saying. But I reiterate, Jesus never does anything without purpose and Jesus never, ever, ever loses his cool. Even as he is beaten and the flesh ripped from his body, the blood pour from his veins, forced to carry his own cross for his execution, and hanging nearly naked by nails pounded into his flesh, every intake of breath agony, people shouting in angry taunts, watching his clothes being gambled off, looking for any kind of compassion in the crowd, seeking the eyes of any of his followers, he doesn't ever lose his cool. So, what is it about this moment with his good friend Peter?

For three years, Jesus has been telling his disciples that this moment was coming, that he was going to have to give up his life, and that it was always the plan for him to give up his life. That it was necessary to complete his purpose here on earth. That this was going to be a season of humiliation, and doubt, and pain, and frustration, and loneliness, and sacrifice. That he was going to die and would rise again on the third day.

And yet, it seems that Peter just casts off that information, thinking that it could never happen. After all, this is Jesus that we are talking about. He watched Jesus as he heal people who were cast aside and forgotten. He ate with sinners. He made no bones about not abiding hypocrisy among the priesthood. He challenged the very foundations of both culture and religion. He performed

miracles for people who would often never even bother to thank him. He taught about a new way to live, and the reality of a loving and gracious God.

Somebody like that couldn't die, even if he said he was going to die. I mean, other than the religious leaders, who couldn't love a man like Jesus who spent his life helping the common person? People like Peter. People like you and me. Why would anyone ever want to hurt him, much less kill him?

Don't you know that this was a hard subject for Christ to talk about, even with his disciples? He was already in agony and struggling with the idea that there might be some other way, even when he knew such thoughts were fruitless. He knew how this was all going to end, and he was doing his best to prepare those closest to him for what was inevitable.

And Peter, God love him, just has to open his mouth during this moment and disagree with Jesus, take him aside and rebuke him like a child, at this time when Jesus is carrying the burden of the world's salvation on his shoulders.

“Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

It is the very last thing that Jesus needs at this time when he is seeking support, and understanding, and compassion, and friendship.

I'm sure that Peter didn't mean it to sound the way it did, but here was the teacher that he loved, the one who brought him out of his life as a fisherman to stand beside him as Jesus went about changing the world. Jesus raised him up to a level that Peter had never envisioned as possible.

“It’s not going to happen, Lord. I won’t let it. I will fight with everything I have. I will protect you at all costs. I will not let you die. I will not let them take you. No matter what anyone else does, I will stand in the gap. They will have to go through me to get to you. I will not let you die.”

Peter is living in the moment, thinking he can keep the inevitable from happening simply because he does not believe it will happen. But if Jesus doesn’t die, the world cannot be saved. If Jesus doesn’t die, the prophecies will not be fulfilled. If Jesus doesn’t die, there can be no New Covenant. If Jesus doesn’t die, then his life will not fulfill its purpose. He must die. Just as he must rise on the third day. As much as Peter denies that this will happen, it is the way things are meant to be. While Peter thinks that everything is going wrong, Jesus is trying to explain to him that everything is actually going right. It might be painful, but everything is on track, just as it should be. There is no plan ‘B.’ There is no other way, and Christ needs him to understand that, even if he has to get tough with him.

And still Peter doesn’t get it. He simply won’t take his mind off earthly things and consider the possibility that these events were set in motion long before the world was created.

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

“Stop it, Peter! You have tunnel vision! You are looking at this the way satan wants you to look at this because satan appeals to the flesh, the things of this

earth, while God has a totally different plan and perspective. It is not about you, Peter! It's not about your loss. It's not even about me. Don't you get it? This is God's plan so that you can be with me permanently. If I don't die, you WILL die and I won't be able to prevent it. Do not be an obstacle to me during this time. I need you to change the way you are thinking. I need you to embrace what is about to happen and stand beside me, not in front of me!"

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Isn't Peter thinking just like a human, living for today in these corporal bodies that will die and decay without accepting that our souls belong to God, that our sinful debt has been paid? We don't want Jesus to die. We don't want him to be beaten, spat upon, humiliated, and hung on a cross! But, if we don't allow him to make the sacrifice, then we will have no place in his Kingdom. We must allow him to express his love for us by dying on that cross. There is no other option. It is our own sin that put him there. It is our own sin that he is paying for which he is paying the price. We must allow him to make this sacrifice.

We tend to focus on the cruelty of the cross, rather than the love he has for each of us that placed him there. Everything he did, he did out of love for us.

I want you to say this with me:

“Jesus loves me!”

Again:

“Jesus loves me!”

Louder please:

“Jesus loves me!”

That’s right, Jesus loves each and every one of us. And please don’t think it is because the Bible tells us so. That’s a cop out. Jesus loved us long before Creation and will love us long after Creation passes away. Jesus loves us, because God loves us, because the Holy Spirit loves us. We bear witness to that love through the grace of the cross. We need to accept that love that put our Savior on that cross, the gift of our redeemer, not the hate of those who drove the nails.

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Don’t allow satan to take away the grace of God’s perfect gift by allowing anyone to put a human price tag on it. Our souls were paid for with heavenly currency and gifted to us by our Creator through his son Jesus. Do not allow your heart to diminish that gift by placing an earthly value on it.

This week and throughout this season of holiness, I want us all to consider what we can learn through Peter. The lessons that Jesus taught him apply to us as well. Let us open our minds to letting go of our earthly values and appreciate the fact that we have been bought with the blood of our Savior, that Jesus needs us to stand in support of his grace, rather than in front of him.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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