

Sermon, *Peter Teaches the Foundations of the Church – Love, Forgiveness, Redemption*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 4.12.26

Welcome to the second Sunday of Easter. I love what the church does on this Sunday – every second Sunday of Easter you will hear the story of Thomas who said *unless I do these things I will not believe*. We get to hear Jesus saying *blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe*. It is a brilliant move for us in the church on the on this high wave of Easter and all the great things that happen with Easter for us to remember the humility of our faith.

For us to remember that Christ reaches out to those who do not believe,
who have not yet to believe,

those who have lost their faith,

and those whose faith is being tested right now,

Jesus reaches out to them. And so for this Sunday, normally I talk about Thomas and his doubts, but I want to talk to you about my favorite apostle, Peter.

I love Peter. He is by far my favorite apostle. He is a real guy. He is a real human doing real things. And it doesn't matter what gospel you look at; you will see him make real mistakes and you will see Jesus pick him back up. But more than than, I love Peter of the New Testament. I love what Peter does after the resurrection, after he denies Jesus – three times. The New Testament shows us the man that Peter becomes; the one the Church is built on; the foundation that he sets forth.

He built the Church on the faith tradition of love, forgiveness and redemption. Regardless of the church that you see in the media, regardless of what you hear out there, the church is built upon this foundation: Love. Love that we do not earn, love that we do not deserve, forgiveness that we do not earn, that we do not deserve, and redemption. God loves us so much that God forgives and God restores and redeems.

This all begins with Peter addressing a crowd on the celebration fifty days after the Passover (Pentecost). There are people gathered there who shouted to Pontius Pilate, *crucify him*. But Peter does not hold that over their heads. Peter does not exclude them. No, Peter and this speech will begin by talking about openness and love because he's talking about love. He's talking about forgiveness. He's talking about redemption. And so Peter tells them right in the beginning, Peter addresses to them about God and God's nature and what God is calling them to do.

Peter said it was the definite plan and foreknowledge of God for Jesus to be handed over. So for those that carried the weight and the guilt of doing that, he just told them this was the plan. He said: *You are a part of the plan. All y'all; every one of you is a part of it. Even King David is a part of it*. Peter talked about what King David said in the psalms and related that to Christ himself. For Peter, it all begins with love – God's love for humanity, through God's plan that has forgiveness and redemption. It's all built in.

What we know about Peter comes from all four Gospels and accounts in the New Testament. There is also Church history. Many wrote about him and, because he established the foundation of the Church, we talk about him to this day. The crux of Peter's theology of God's love, forgiveness and redemption is that it happened to him first. Peter was called by Jesus – not

because of something Peter did, but because Jesus was a part of God's plan. Then there are the mistakes. Peter messes up a lot and, as we heard in our Good Friday reading, when the guards came to arrest Jesus, Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the High Priest. Jesus (I believe) restored the ear and told Peter to put away his sword. Peter then denied Jesus, three times; the third denial came and Jesus looked out and made eye contact with him. We don't hear much from Peter after that until a resurrection story where Jesus and Peter meet. Jesus asks him three times if he loves Him. Many believe that was restoring and healing to Peter (just like the servant's ear). Then, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter, full of the Holy Spirit addresses the crowd. He speaks to them as someone who has been loved, forgiven and redeemed. ... because he has.

One of the stories about Peter from Church history is when he was arrested. He was taken, forcibly, to Rome. For whatever reason, he didn't go by boat; they took him the long way around in a 1st Century paddy wagon. I wear a rope around my robe – all the altar servers do – to remind us of Peter being rounded up and taken away. On the way, people flocked out to follow the caravan with Peter. He would talk to them, preach about God's goodness in Christ, while he was being taken to Rome. One such story is where the wheel broke. While the guards were fixing it, Peter addressed the crowd. The first thing he did was forgive his captors and asked God to bless them and their families. He then told them that Peter did the worst and Jesus forgave him so we must forgive one another, as we have been forgiven, and love as we have been loved. God will redeem and restore us, and all of humanity, including the Roman guard holding him. This is what the Church is built upon – love, forgiveness and redemption.

When Peter made it to Rome, he started writing to the church – to the generation that has not seen Jesus yet has come to believe. And that the first thing that we have listed today in our reading from First Peter is that he wrote *on account of God's vast mercy, God has given us new birth and you have been born a new into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*. It is a new way of thinking, a new orientation on life, a "metanoia". It is redemption. It is a way of focusing ourselves onto love and to forgiveness and on our own redemption.

There was a belief back then that if you followed the way, because Christianity wasn't known as Christianity yet, it was known as the way; if you follow the Way, everything will be fine. You won't have temptations. You won't have trials. You won't have distress. Is that true, church? No. I mean, it would be great if it was, wouldn't it? That suddenly you follow this way and then nothing bad ever happens and you win the lottery every time you play. And... yeah, that's not how it works.

Peter is addressing it directly in this letter and that is our faith when it comes under duress is found. When we get tested, that's where the true measure of faith comes into play. Peter is an expert at talking about faith and talking about testing and even talking about failing. Peter knows what it's like to have the chips down and to fail. And so, he's telling us about God's love and God's forgiveness and God's redemption to a level that I don't think any of us have ever experienced.

So when Peter starts off with a crowd on Pentecost, some of which who were shouting for Jesus to be crucified, and when he talked to them about love and forgiveness and for redemption, he's talking about himself. He's talking about this is what I have experienced that God has forgiven all the things that I've done. God will forgive you too. God loves me despite all the things I've done. God loves you, too. God has redeemed me despite all of these things. God will redeem you.

Some of us are in a period of life where we are questioning the faith that we have been given. Some are being tested and some have news that's pressing upon them that is challenging to their faith. Peter is the first one to tell you, *no matter how far you walk away, Jesus will be right there with you. No matter how difficult and stressful the time is, Jesus will be with you right there all the way.* And Peter will remind us of his own failings and that because of that he now knows the depth and the complexity of God's forgiveness and of God's love and of God's redemption.

So on this second Sunday of Easter, in the brilliance of the Church to know that this is the Sunday we should talk about doubt, we are reminded of what the chief apostle is telling us then and telling us today that God loves you.

It doesn't matter who you are, what you've done, how far you've walked away. God loves you. It doesn't matter how many times you've denied. It doesn't matter because God's love and God's mercy, God's forgiveness is bigger than all of that. It encompasses all of that and more.

The last thing Peter wrote in today's passage is that the product of our faith is salvation. This redemption that we feel in this life is the redemption and the salvation that we feel in the next. And so no matter where you are in your walk in faith, God loves you. God is forgiving you and God redeems all of us.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.