



Matthew 16 Peter the Rock

SUMMER SERMON
JULY 29/AUG 1/2 2015

1ST, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

Isaiah 51:1-6, 15-16; Matthew 16:13-23
Sinner and Saint

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever had ***one of those days...***

- when **everything** goes right, and **nothing** goes wrong,
- when the **road ahead** is smooth, not bumpy,
- when the **universe** seems for you...rather than against you???

Well, that's the way **Peter's** day...started **out**... The disciples and Jesus are walking along, basking in the glow of a day or so ago, when the Lord fed thousands of people using only seven loaves of bread and a few small fish (Matthew 15:32-38).

Up to this point, Jesus' ministry has been on the rise:

- his popularity will never be higher,
- his future will never look brighter,
- his disciples' spirits will never feel lighter...

So Jesus asks his question: ***Who do people say that the Son of Man is?***
They reply, *John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or another great prophet...* And then he says, ***But who do you say that I am?***

Seemingly without hesitation, without even drawing a breath, with no apparent need to contemplate, deliberate, cogitate or meditate, Peter takes a swing – and knocks one out of the park – clears the bases with a grand-slam home run: ***You are the Messiah***, he says, ***the Son of the living God...***

...And in a rare burst of positive emotion, Jesus says to Peter, ***Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah!*** The Lord praises him for making that amazing confession – then he goes on to give Peter a glimpse of who God has called him to be, and what God’s mission is for this former fisherman.

Peter, who gets it about Jesus...

-has been directly inspired by God...

-will be the rock upon whom Christ will build his church...

-over whom the power of hell will not prevail...

-and it’s he who’s entrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven...this man will become ***Saint Peter!!***

Amazing stuff, right? This is Peter’s golden hour, his time to shine, his 15 minutes of fame, his glory days...

...Yet in the blink of an eye, in the fraction of a second, in the brief moment it takes for Lutherans to walk into a strange building and sniff out a coffee pot...things quickly come apart at the seams...

Everything changes...take a look at what happens next, and help me try to figure out what’s behind Jesus’ very surprising – and disturbing! – response. **Read verses 21-23...**

²¹ From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Saint Peter? How about Satan's Peter! **What's going on here? What do you suppose is the reason for Jesus' incredibly strong reaction?**

- How hard it will be for Jesus to sacrifice his life.
- How hard he's hoping that the disciples won't blow it.
- ???

So let's compare these two stories:

In the first, Peter says something **amazing** and is **praised** by Jesus.
In the next, Peter says something **stupid** and is **blasted** by Jesus.

How do we take these two opposites and hold them together?

You remember the rest of Peter's story, right? On the night Jesus is betrayed, the Lord foretells of how all the disciples will desert him. Peter replies: *I will never desert you* (Mt. 26:33).

Then Jesus utters those depressing words: *Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.* But Peter protests, *Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.*

And we all know how that turned out, don't we?

So what are we supposed to do with this rock upon whom Jesus promised to build his church? Is he *saint material*, is he **granite**, is he **solid** enough to be the cornerstone of some good news that can change the world? **Or** is he made out of *sinner* stuff, like **sandstone**, easily eroded, and unable to hold **fast** against the pressures of life?

The truth is – **he's both**. Peter comes through in the end...because **Jesus** comes through in the end. And **because** of that, **Peter** is changed

from sandstone to granite, from **denier** of Jesus to **proclaimer** of Jesus, from *confused follower* to **spiritual leader** of the Church.

And in Peter's story, there is some **very** good news for *you and me*. For in so many ways, *his story* is also our *his-tory*, no?

We **all** have our wonderful moments of insight, inspiration, understanding about Jesus' call to love and serve the Lord. And **then** we **also** have those **terrible** moments when we should have kept our **mouths closed** and our **ears open** – rather than the **other** way around...

But the **good** news is that Jesus did **not** *give up* on Peter, did not **revoke** his promise to **trust** him to become the **rock** upon whom he would build the church...

Though Peter made serious mistakes, Jesus knew that God would anchor his heart in the good news of God's love for all people.

And here's the **best** news: if Jesus can use **Peter**...then guess who **else** can he use??? You and me!!

Faithful...and faithless, **insightful** and **clueless**, solid and changing, **trusting** and **plagued** with **doubts** – we all are, said Martin Luther, at one and the same time, *sinner and saint*.

Isn't the Lord amazing? He can take ordinary people like Peter, like you and like me...and work through us to bless this entire world with the good news of God's love for all people, for all creation.

So don't worry too much about the sinner side of you – Jesus has taken care of that part on the cross – once for all: all time, all people. Instead, have fun searching out the saintly side of you – see what God has in mind for the people you can serve and the good you can do. Amen.