

“You are the Christ, the Messiah”

Luke 24:1-12

He is Risen!

Good Morning dear ones, we have arrived on this most beautiful day. Jesus has risen! The tomb is empty. The power of death is no more. Amen and Praise God! Easter just get me every single year- a day to celebrate life when it seemed all was lost. A day to celebrate possibility in the face of the possible. A day to believe in miracles, a day to ground ourselves in hope.

One of the things I love about the Easter story, of which Roger just read a section of, is how embodied, how visceral, how grounded in real humanness the whole story is. You can almost smell the spices that the women have brought, as they cross the dewy ground towards the tomb. You can feel that still, sinking fear as they realize the stone is rolled away. Their hesitant steps into the tomb. The terror and joy intermingling when the Angels appear, blindingly bright and say that they are looking in the wrong place for Jesus. Dead men lie in tombs, but Jesus is not dead- he is alive! They drop their jars of spices, lift the hem of their robes and they run back to town to tell the 12. The image of two women, running, desperate, laughing, crying, breathing heavily through the streets of Jerusalem, as the sun has begun to rise, as curious neighbors peer out their windows. They burst into the door where the fearful, grieving men are sitting and they deliver the news. Jesus is alive! The tomb is empty! The angels said so! The men, faces

blank and confused, some angry and dismissive, assume this is a tale, an act of wild female imagination, the man is dead. Everything is lost. And then in verse 12, “But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.” Peter hears the words and the women, and hoists himself up and runs, all in for the tomb. It is empty, just as they had said. Could this be real? Could this be true? Peter walks back to the city, certain of what he has seen, marveling at this possibility, wanting and needing it to be true, that his beloved Jesus is alive.

This morning, we’ll use the story of Peter to walk us through the Easter story. The man who leaps up and runs to the tomb, full tilt. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, I love Peter. Peter is a man who is all YES or all NO. Peter is not someone who does things halfway. Peter is wild and impetuous. Sometimes he’s a complete mess. He feels deeply and seems to have no filter in terms of what he “should” say or should “do”. To put it another way, Peter is so, so very human.

We’re going to backtrack a little in Peter’s story to Matthew chapter 16. This would have been early on in Peter’s “career” as a disciple of Jesus. It says this, “When Jesus and his disciples were near the town of Caesarea Philippi, he asked them, “What do people say about the Son of Man?” The disciples answered, “Some people say you are John the Baptist or maybe Elijah or Jeremiah or some other prophet.” Then Jesus asked, “But who do you say I am?” Simon Peter spoke up, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus told him: Simon, son of Jonah, you are blessed! You didn’t discover

this on your own. It was shown to you by my Father in heaven. So I will call you Peter, which means “a rock.” On this rock I will build my church, and death itself will not have any power over it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and God in heaven will allow whatever you allow on earth. But he will not allow anything you don't allow. Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone he was the Messiah.”

It's a stunning declaration, both on the part of Peter and the part of Jesus. You can almost imagine Jesus having this conversation in an off-handed way as they're walking along a road. What are people saying about me? The other disciples list off the Prophets, the ones who Jesus is likened to. And then Jesus asks them, but what do you say? There's a silence as they struggle to find the words. Should we say it? Are our suspicions right? Is he a prophet? And Peter blurts out, “You are the Messiah, son of the Living God.” They all stop walking, and turn to face Peter, who stands there wide eyed, his declaration of the truth that he knows deep in his bones has surprised even him. He gets it, Jesus is the son of God, and what's more he says it. Jesus' face is alight with joy, warmth, and love for Peter, who gets it. He cristens him with a new name, Peter, which means rock or stone, because Jesus will build his church on this rock.

Who wouldn't want to hear those words, that promise from Jesus? To be that guy? Jesus says that the father has revealed all this Peter and this is how the church will be built, on this rock, the declaration that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God.

Now let's fast forward to the Passion and the Easter story, I'm going to be jumping

around in the story quite a bit, highlighting the places that we find Peter, this all comes from the last chapters of the book of Matthew.

After they have eaten the passover meal, Jesus and some of the disciples are heading to the Mount of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemane, and on the way Jesus says to “tonight, you’re all going to abandon me, because the Prophets said, “they will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will scatter”, but after I rise I’ll meet you in Galilee” and Peter shouts out, “Even if everyone else leaves you, I will never leave you!” and just like before, they all stop on the road, turn and face a wide eyed Peter. He’s passionate, angry at the words of Jesus. Jesus meets Peter’s raging gaze with pain? Compassion? Sorrow?” And Jesus says, “Peter, the truth is, before the rooster crows morning you’ll deny that you even knew me, three times.” Peter, still so fiery says, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never leave you!” And all the other disciples agree with him.

They arrive at the garden of Gethsemane, and Jesus is in agony about what will soon happen. He knows he has to get away and pray or he’s never going to be able to do this. He takes James, John and Peter with him to a secluded place in the garden, he tells them, stay here, keep watch and pray. I need you to hold me in prayer for what’s about to happen. Jesus goes a bit further ahead to pray by himself. He comes back later to check on Peter, James and John. They’re fast asleep. They couldn’t do it. He begs them again to keep watch and prayer. He came back a second time to find them sleeping again. You couldn’t keep watch with me even one hour? These men said they would die for him not two hours before. Jesus comes back a third time, sees the mob

coming up the path to take him and he says to James, Peter and John, Get up! My time has come!

Judas then betrays Jesus with kiss, and the mob arrests him. It's complete chaos- angry people, struggling, darkness, shouting screaming, who's who? What's what? And in the mix, one of Jesus's followers, grabs a sword, swings it and cuts of the ear of one the servants of the high priest. Scripture doesn't say this, it's complete conjecture on my part, but I've often wondered if it isn't Peter who is wielding the sword. It fits with his act now-think later personality. Regardless, Jesus heals the servant's ear and says that "those who live by the sword will die by the sword." And as the mob takes Jesus down the path, back to Jerusalem to face the drummed up charges, all the disciples, Peter included, scatter into the night.

Later on the scripture, in Matthew 26, Jesus is standing before Caiphus, the High Priest in the Jewish Sanhedrin. The sanhedrin was a group of Jewish elders, rabbis, who were appointed as the tribunal in every city in Israel. They're role was to settle disputes and uphold the Jewish laws and customs. They are seeking to find crimes Jesus has committed. The passage says Peter is here, in the background, trying to find out what is happening. Jesus is found guilty of blasphemy against God and deserves death. Jesus is carted off by the guards and a bewildered and scared Peter makes his way outside to the courtyard where crowds are gathered.

"Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also

were with Jesus of Galilee,” she said. But he denied it before them all. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.” He denied it again, with an oath: “I don’t know the man!” After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.” Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!” Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly. Peter who swore that we would die for Jesus, has denied him vehemently three times.

The next time we see Peter again in the text is when he leaps up at the women’s pronouncement and runs to the tomb, searching for Jesus.

Let’s review: Peter declares Jesus the Messiah. Jesus says that Peter will be the rock that his church is built upon, which the powers of hell will not prevail against. Peter swears he will never betray Jesus! Peter falls asleep. Twice. Peter grabs a sword and slices off an ear. Peter flees into the night. Sits in the background to witness Jesus’ charge of blasphemy against God. Peter denies knowing Jesus. Peter weeps. Peter runs. -Messiah. Rock. Never Betray! Snoring. More snoring. Ahhhhh! Fleeing. Sitting by. Denying. Weeping. Running. Not exactly the kind of thing one associates with the rock of the church.

Aren't we all in some way or another at one time or another, Peter? Aren't we all in or all out? Passionately declaring our faith in Jesus one day and afraid and unsure the next? Aren't we all as beautifully, human and flawed as Peter? I sure am.

But here is the good news, the best news for Peter and for all of us on this Easter Morning. Jesus comes to us, the real us. He was born, lived, died and rose for the Real Us. "For God so loved this world, the real world that he gave his one and only son." Peter finds grace each time because he needs and wants Jesus, no matter how many times he fails, Jesus is there. Building his church through all of us because we need and want Jesus.

I think of how often Jesus criticized the Pharisees and their legalism, their false piety. The religious leaders thought they knew the right answers, believed that they had things figured out, and certainly many of them lived moral, upstanding lives. But Peter, the Rock of the Church, definitely did not have things figured out, was tripped up time and time again, but he knew he needed Jesus. He wanted Jesus. And Jesus met him there. And for all of us who need and want Jesus, no matter how many times we fail, Jesus is there. Having it all figured out is not a prerequisite for being the church, for being God's beloved.

Preston Peautaux, who some of you may remember from the 2021 MCSask ADS sessions, shared this photo on Instagram. Preston is the Pastor at Lake Ridge Community Church in Chestermere, Alberta.

Under this picture, he wrote, "See this chair? I had to go find it when I visited Jerusalem last week. It's part of an infamous story that set off a brawl on the roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 2002. Groups of Christian monks used to get in fist fights, in this case because a sick monk moved his chair out of the sun and into the shade. He got beat up for crossing a line. In the holiest place for Christians, the place that marks the death and resurrection of Jesus, there's violence. Strangely, it makes sense. I've come to believe that it's into fear, hypocrisy, ego and anger that the story of Jesus lands. It's really the whole point. But there's a twist; instead of throwing punches, he takes them. All the religious pomp, hate and greed of angry people turn to hoist Jesus onto a cross. This chair is hope for me at Easter. Jesus came into my story, to draw up a seat beside me. He sees my clenched fists, my own fear, my own hypocrisy. He's not deterred, instead, he comes ever closer. It's here that I'm loved, forgiven and befriended again. Jesus came close to me, and called me his own. For failed followers of Jesus like Peter, those fist-fighting monks, and me, there's Good News in the Easter Story. He reaches out, not with a fist, but a nail pierced hand, and an embrace. He is Risen."

Amen.