

The Rock Sinks, Again

There is a fable that goes like this: There was an officer in the navy who had always dreamed of commanding a battleship. He finally achieved that dream and was given commission of the newest and proudest ship in the fleet. One stormy night, as the ship ploughed through the seas, the captain was on duty on the bridge when off to the port side he spotted a strange light rapidly closing with his own vessel. Immediately he ordered the signalman to flash the message to the unidentified craft: 'Alter your course ten degrees to the south.' Only a moment had passed before the reply came: 'Alter your course ten degrees to the north.' Determined that his ship would take a backseat to no other, the captain snapped out the order to be sent: 'Alter your course ten degrees - I am the CAPTAIN!' The response beamed back: 'Alter your course ten degrees - I am Seaman Third Class Jones.' Now infuriated, the captain grabbed the signal beam with his own hands and fired off: 'Alter course, I am a battleship.' The reply came back: 'Alter your course, I am a lighthouse.'

This is the type of scenario that we see today in the Gospel reading. Last week, Peter made the big confession that Jesus was "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Jesus then told Peter that Jesus will build His church upon this confession. Jesus also told Peter that whatever Peter allowed on earth would be allowed in heaven and what Peter did not allow on earth, would not be allowed in heaven. Perhaps emboldened with this sense of power, Peter speaks out when Jesus begins to tell the disciples what must happen to Him. Peter looks through human eyes and understanding and tells Jesus that God would never allow this to happen. Peter, feeling as proud and distinguished as the captain of the battleship, believed that he could get the lighthouse to change its course. Peter, the student, the disciple is telling Jesus, the Teacher, the Son of God what must happen. In a not so gentle way, Jesus corrects Peter and sets him straight.

There were probably at least two reasons that were behind Peter's rebuking of Jesus. The first was the feelings that Peter had for Jesus. Peter could see that Jesus was special, unlike any person he had ever known. There was the love, the care, the compassion that Jesus exhibited toward others, even complete strangers. Then there were the teachings that Jesus gave the disciples and the crowds. It was unlike any other preacher's teaching, captivating people and making them examine how they live their lives. Peter had developed a genuine love for this man. The second thing that influenced Peter's rebuke was the expectation of how the Messiah would come. At that time, there were several different scenarios of how the Messiah would come to the Jews. One of those was that the Messiah would come as a conquering king, leading an army that would get rid of the oppressive Romans, restoring Israel to independence and world leadership. Another expectation was that the Messiah would come as a great teacher and administrator of the law. However people thought the Messiah would come, each of the expectations was grounded in human thinking, within the institutions that humans had developed. If Peter was really believing that Jesus was God's promised Messiah, then what Jesus was now teaching them did not fit in with any of the expectations. Certainly, Jesus must be wrong!

How often is it that we act like Peter, over-confident in our faith that we believe we can positively think we know God's will; or if we wish or pray hard enough we can change God's plan, effectively telling God what to do, that is getting the lighthouse to move? We needn't feel ashamed for doing this. As we have seen, Peter tried to do this and the Bible is full of people who thought they knew God's plan. But none of them knew and none of us know the details of the plan. God has always done the unexpected. He chose a childless, nomadic family in which to reveal Himself to the world, giving them a homeland and many descendants. God chose the youngest son of a man from one of the smaller tribes of Israel to unite the Israelites and serve as their king. God sent

prophets who were not learned scholars but who had a love of God in their hearts to the people telling them they strayed from God's ways and they should repent and turn back to God. God sent His only Son into this world to suffer and die so that we might live. Whenever people felt they knew God's plan and tried to change it, God usually did the unexpected. Instead of feeling ashamed for this, we should repent and give ourselves over to God's plan that was revealed to us through Jesus Christ.

That plan is that we should set aside our own personal desires and serve others who are needy. Those who are needy may have physical needs - food, clothing, shelter; or spiritual needs - the need to learn about Jesus, the need to have peace in their lives. The promise here is if we do this in Jesus' name, then we will be given life. This life isn't just in the afterlife, in heaven. Many years ago, there was a radio broadcast of a worship service from Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Mankato. Some of their youth had just returned from a mission trip to a poor area in Michigan. Many of the youth who spoke told of their expectations of helping others. What they didn't expect was how it affected them. By giving of themselves, giving up what they had, they got back a greater sense of themselves and a greater sense of how they fit in with God's plan. I'm sure many of us could see examples in our own lives where we served others and in return received much more in blessings.

In the reading from Jeremiah, God is telling Jeremiah that what he is asking God to do is from a human perspective, it is not God's plan. God promises Jeremiah that if he does God's will, then Jeremiah will be blessed because God will prevail. In the passage we heard from Romans, Paul picks up this theme and Jesus' urging us to set aside our own desires for others. Paul urges us to follow Jesus, to do the unexpected. Instead of fighting our enemies, we should feed them if they are hungry. Instead of looking down on others, we should welcome them.

Over the last couple of weeks, we have seen Peter have some 'highs' and some 'lows' in his faith. The highs allowed him to walk on water with Jesus and proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. In the lows, Peter sank in the water when he looked away from Jesus. Peter sinks again in today's reading when he presumes to know what God is up to and Jesus rebukes him. In many ways, we are a lot like Peter. Sometimes we doubt; sometimes we have a great conviction about who Jesus is; sometimes we expect things a certain way; sometimes we become a stumbling block to others because of those expectations and sometimes we get caught up in our own desires, our own view of the world that we expect God to change His course, His plans. But despite all this, Jesus is there, the lighthouse on the rock to show us the way. He reveals God's plan to us. A plan that includes picking us up no matter how many times we sink as well as many blessings and salvation for us simply because God loves us.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: https://youtu.be/_zPjLw2vWjc

Service: <https://youtu.be/a2NODN-bZIA>