

The Twelve Disciples: Peter

He was a strong, quick-tempered fisherman. Again and again Peter pushed Jesus to be the man he thought he would be. He made mistakes, but he made them with all the gusto and faith he could muster. He had cast his nets for fish for many years before he met Jesus, and his Lord showed him how to cast nets for the souls of men and women.

The first called to follow Jesus, along with his brother, Andrew, Simon was in the act of fishing, his ancestral occupation, when they first met. As Jesus walked up to Peter, the first words he heard his Savior say were, “Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people.”

From one action to the next, that was where Peter was destined to be. I sometimes think that our lives should be changed so much that when we become a Christian, our names are changed like Peter’s was. He was first Simon, Son of Jonah, and the name Jonah means “dove”. Then Jesus changed his name to Peter, which means “rock.”

What he was saying to Peter was “Up until now you have been a fluttering, flighty dove. But now, as you take me as Lord, I will make you a rock.”

Which one describes you, dear reader? Are you fluttering around the world, not knowing your destination, and being charmed from moment to moment by temporary, unimportant things? Or are you a rock upon which God and his people can count, a person who knows his lord and lets nothing stand in the way of that journey?

Of course, Peter was human. He denied his Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. Three times. And the last time with an oath. But the story did not end there.

Jesus forgave him, and made him the first of the apostles, who was the leader of the fledgling church after Jesus returned to heaven. It was to Peter that the people looked for strength, for healing, and direction. It was to Peter that they looked for miracles. There is one account in which when even the shadow of Peter passed over a person, they were healed.

Now that's faith. That's power. That's direction. And God asks the same from us.

It was near the close of Jesus' earthly ministry, after the resurrection, when Jesus asks Peter if he loves him. "Yes, Lord," he says. Three times Jesus asks him, and three times he says he does. "Then feed my sheep," says Jesus.

So Peter gave the word of God as spiritual food, and provided physical food for those in need. We need modern day manna from heaven, which tells us God cares and loves us enough to send his son to earth to redeem us.

The shadow of Peter casts not darkness as an earthly shadow, but a shadow of light over today's church. He calls us to leave our nets and follow Jesus. He exhorts us to be risk takers in the name of the Lord. He preached the first Christian sermon on the day of Pentecost. He accepted the gentile Cornelius into the fellowship of the Christian church, opening the door for you and me to know the Lord Jesus. He was one of the first to meet the risen Lord, and one of many disciples to suffer the death of crucifixion for his faith.

Peter showed us that if we want to walk on water, the least we can do is step out of the boat. As long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, he could literally and spiritually walk on water. Just as his ancestors had walked across the Red Sea thousands of years before, Peter was privy to the power and transcendence of Almighty God.

The church, if it is to be what God intends it to be, must follow the example of the first disciple. We must share that gospel and never keep it to ourselves. We must seek danger, risk, and challenge in his service. We must open doors that heretofore have never been opened.

What do you have to give to the service of your Lord? It is different things for different people, but we all have something.

At the temple gate called Beautiful, in Jerusalem, after Jesus had gone back to heaven, Peter and John were standing there as a lame beggar spoke to them. Peter's words? "Silver and gold have I none, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." He jumped to his feet and not only walked, but was leaping and praising God.

It is time for the church to stop sitting. We must walk in the ways of our Lord. We must praise him as we worship and serve. We must amaze the world as we give what God has given us. And we must leap to heights people have never seen before, because that is what God makes possible for his people.