

16 Pentecost
September 12, 2021
God's Rocker

Peter is given the keys not because of nothing other than being chosen by Jesus. **Mark 8:27-38**

**Come Holy Spirit, our souls inspire and light us
with celestial fire. Ignite our hearts, inflame our souls,
and inspire our spirits that we may burn anew with your love.
Amen.**

Sermon

Surely you've heard, surely you've read much about all that divide US in our country. The list seems endless: politics, war, freedom, public safety, climate, sex, race, vaccines, violence and even mask. Division seems to dominate. The things that unites US - never sees the light of day.

If anything, I wonder what it is that unites us. I wish it were good news and widely accepted, but it is neither. The thing that seems to unite us is disillusionment. Matters not where we sit or stand, there is disillusionment with our leaders, our political system, with economics, with religion and the church.

Many leaders use our disillusionment to their advantage. Fear, anger, and resentment are powerful wedges and motivators. They energize quick reactions. It is not just in politics either. Many are heartbroken and angry over the lack of leadership in our church as well as the scandals found in major faith communities. I suspect disillusionment has a role in the decline of church attendance and influence. To see and read more on disillusionment, go to social media. Most conversations race from debate to accusations and end at fiery fury.

My bet is that every one of us could tell a story about our personal disillusion, unique to our life story. Haven't there been times when your life wasn't what you thought it was - and may never be? UP

Disillusion happens when the story we've lived, the story on which we based our lives and beliefs, the story to which we committed ourselves, no longer makes sense, is no longer relevant, no longer works, or is no longer true. Disillusionment is an in between time, a time when we have lost faith in the familiar story but have not yet embraced an unfamiliar story.

This in between times leaves us panicked and fearful. The world feels like a dangerous and chaotic place, out of control.

While we focus on the external factions, disillusion often begins in us. It may even be a spiritual issue. Many attempts are made to resolve it with the spiritual assurance. You've heard it said: "when God closes a door, he opens a window." It's that in between time, in between the closed door and open window that is all too real. I call it: "hell in the hallway." Today we find Peter in that hallway.

It begins very positively when Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah. His ideals for what the Messiah is, what the Messiah should do and be, well, they're very grand. Jesus closes that door by challenging Peter's ideal. "The Son of Man," Jesus says, "must undergo great suffering and be rejected, be killed, and after three days rise again." This is **not** Peter's idea of what the Messiah is.

Peter's Messiah is more a land flowing with milk and honey, the promised kingdom. The reality offered by Jesus is neither what Peter expected nor what he wanted. So he plans a little "come to Jesus" chat with Jesus. Peter plans to straighten Jesus out. After all, Peter knows best. So no sooner had he confessed Jesus as Lord, Peter turns to rebuke him, all with the same tongue almost in the same conversation.

He does so because, after all he has been promoted; one that seems more than odd to the other disciples. They remember the Peter who sank in the middle of his walk across the water. But Jesus says "Simon Bar-Jonah, you are now called Peter and on this rock I will build my church." Well the disciple watch as Jesus soon stubs his toes on this rock. In his new role, Peter decides he must set Jesus straight on what will happen in Jerusalem. Jesus responds, "Get behind me, Satan." It is like he is telling Peter to get lost. For the "Rock" is now a stumbling block. Just like that, Peter goes from being blessed to being satanic, from being a cornerstone of the church to being a toe stubbing stone to Christ. What a fall for Peter. What does it all mean?

Like us, like many in our nation, Peter is disillusioned. The story he lived by as a disciple for years is not the story Jesus now says is his future. Peter has reached that point in his discipleship where what is happening isn't making sense. He is starting to ask question and

realize this is not what he signed on to do. He has given so much to achieve success but he is seeing only disaster.

Being down and discouraged and defeated is at the core of disillusionment. What we, what Peter, and what the disciples thought would happen has **not**. So he left being confused and disappointed and unhappy. An experiences we know well these days of our lives.

Disillusionment often happens when we try to be the Messiah. If we are honest, sometimes we act like Peter wanting to straighten Jesus out or worse be God for a day. Isn't that part of what's going on in the conflicts we have. Too often these days, we assert ourselves and belittle in our words and actions. In our panic to fix fast, we become arrogant and betray ourselves, each other, and our God.

This is why I give "thanks" for Peter! HE's like US and our nation. Right or wrong, he is always the first one out of the gate, the first to leave his fishnet and follow Jesus, the first one out of the boat to walk on the water, the first to volunteer his opinion on any matter. Sometimes it is hard to say whether he is courageous, impulsive or opinionated, but his life impress Jesus because he pronounced Peter blessed. He is "The Rock" upon which the church will be built, and the inheritor of the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

Peer shows how to deal with our spirit of disillusionment. He is our role model, not due to his flawless character, his intellect, or even his spiritual depth. Not even because he is they keeper of the keys either. He is - because Peter is real - human. He is someone like us who says things and then regrets them, or makes brave promises, like I'll do anything. Peter said if I must die with you, I will not deny you - but then in the heat of the night he loses heart saying not once but three times, I know not Christ.

Peter is a role model in key ways to get through disillusion. He keeps on keeping on. He is willing to go first, to speak his mind, and that every time he falls down he gets back up again, brushes himself off, and charges ahead. While the other disciples hang back for fear of giving the wrong answer, Peter never considers that the thing to do.

Peter is given the keys not because the right answer has occurred to him. He is given them because he is chosen by Jesus, because Jesus in his unsearchable wisdom, he is unknowable way, Jesus decided to pick a bullheaded, big-hearted, fallible, stubborn, never-say-

the rock upon which to build his church. These human traits are keys to getting Peter through his disillusionment and going forward in faith.

Since Peter is chosen as the rock upon which the church is built, then there is hope for all of us, because he is the one of us, because he remains God's chosen rock whether he is acting like a cornerstone or a stumbling block, and because he shows us that blessedness is less about perfection and more about willingness - that counts. As does risking our own answers, to go ahead and try, to get up one more time try.

Mostly I am glad to know that Peter's the one in charge of Heaven's Gates. Someone like him may understand someone like me- someone who finds profound answers hard to come by, someone who finds it easier and safer to repeat other people's answers- because I have not thought about my own, or because my own do not sound good enough, or because I do not trust God to help me.

So I pray you move through that hallway of disillusionment. You may say something stupid, but then again you may surprise yourself and say something inspiring instead. The important thing is to try - not only to say what we believe - but also to live what we believe - - knowing that we are Peter's kin, and that whether we rise or whether we fall, whether we give the right answer or the wrong one, we too are chips off the old block, pieces of that one true rock against which even the very powers of darkness shall not prevail. This I believe is the Word of the Lord. Amen.

I am grateful indebted to the Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor's sermon "God's Rock" for content, ideas and structure found in this sermon. Published in her book, "The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew."

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The Blessing,

And now may the peace of God, the peace that passes all our understanding, may it keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our LORD; And the blessing God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.