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Sermon: February 28, 2010  
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“BY OUR HANDS? FOR OUR SAKE! PETER”**  
Matthew 14:28-31; 16:21-23; 17:1-7; 26:31-35, 69-75;  
John 21:15-19

What is it with Simon Peter?

→ He is quick to drop his net and become a Christ Follower. Along with James and John he is the Lord’s closest friend, and he is the very first person to say of Jesus {Mt 16:16} **“You are the Christ [the Messiah], the Son of the living God.”**

→ After the resurrection, Peter is the first male disciple to enter the empty tomb. Fifty days later he is filled by the Holy Spirit and preaches with such power that {Acts 2:41} **“three thousand”** listeners “[accept] **his message**” and are **“baptized” “that day.”**

Peter heals the sick. He casts out demons. He is hauled before the Jewish high council and boldly testifies that the Jesus they crucified is the risen Messiah.

Peter is the first Church leader to eat with, preach to, and baptize Gentiles without requiring them to convert to Judaism. He writes two New Testament epistles.

And skipping ahead to A.D. 67 or 68, we find Peter standing firm for Jesus – so firm, he allows himself to be crucified even though he has the opportunity to escape.

By the same token his mistakes are so cringe-worthy, so dumbfounding that the only fitting response is a V-8 Juice bonk to the forehead.

① Episode 1 is in Matthew 14:28-31. The Twelve are in a boat when a sudden storm threatens to drown them.

Jesus comes walking across the Sea of Galilee and says, **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”** Peter calls back, **“Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.”** **‘Come,’ he says.”**

Peter gets out of the boat and successfully walks on the water toward Jesus. But then he feels a stab of fear and begins to sink. Jesus rescues him and says: **“You of little faith, why did you doubt?”**

☹ Naturally, Peter feels afraid. Anyone would. The problem is that he allows his fear to crowd out his faith and sink him.

Peter has been with the Lord for almost two and ½ years. He has witnessed dozens of miracles. He’s experienced his Master’s care. Doesn’t Peter trust Jesus’ power and desire to help? It is a V-8 moment!

② Episode 2 is in Matthew 16:21-23. Jesus explains that He **“must be killed and...raised to life.”**

Peter rebukes him: **“Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!”** Jesus’ response is harsh, but 100% necessary ~ **“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”**

✝ The cross is not a failure to be avoided, much less is it a defeat to be surmounted. It is the sacredly ordained instrument of the kingdom of God.

✝ Neither is the cross an anomaly. It is not just a one-time means to *launch* the kingdom; it embodies the kingdom’s *permanent nature*. If Jesus avoids it there will be no forgiveness of sin, no reconciliation with Holy God, no discipleship, no abundant living, no victory over death, no kingdom of God, period.

☹ At this point, it is OK that Peter does not get this. What is not OK is that Peter imagines he knows better than Jesus (!) and presumes to act on his ignorance.

Peter has watched his Master doing God's will for over 2 ½ years. He has observed his unequalled wisdom and perfect insight. And just moments before, in Mt 16:16, he called Jesus, "**Son of the living God.**" Does Peter trust Jesus' judgment, or doesn't he? It is a V-8 moment!

③ Episode 3 occurs six days later in Matthew 17:1-7. Jesus takes Peter, James and John up on a mountain and is "**transfigured before them. His face [shines] like the sun,**" "**his clothes [turn] as white as the light,**" and "**Moses and Elijah**" appear with him. Peter impulsively interrupts: {NLT} "**Lord,**" he blurts out, "**this is wonderful! If you want me to, I'll make three shrines, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.**" As Peter speaks a commanding voice from heaven interrupts *him*: "**This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!**"

The Transfiguration points to the glory Jesus will receive *after* the cross in honor of his hard obedience. It foreshadows the words of Philippians 2:6-11, which draw a direct link between Christ's humiliating death and magnificent exaltation.

Peter's enthusiasm for Jesus' glory is spot-on.

☹ However, he assumes that the Transfiguration is a sign Jesus can be glorified without suffering "**at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law.**"

→ For nearly three years Peter has heard the Lord say, "**Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me**

**is not worthy of me**" (Matthew 10:38); "**Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me**" (Matthew 16:24); and lately He has begun to explain "**that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.**" Doesn't Peter trust Jesus to do the best thing? It is a V-8 moment!

④ That brings us to Episode 4, recorded in Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 18.

■ In Matthew 26:31-35 Jesus has just finished eating the Passover meal with the Twelve. He warns, "**this very night you will all fall away on account of me.**"

Peter replies, in all sincerity, "**Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.**"

Jesus answers, "**Truly I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.**"

But Peter declares, "**Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.**" And the others say the same.

■ Jump ahead to Matthew 26:69-75.

A few hours have passed. Jesus has been arrested and taken to the high priest. Peter follows at a distance and finds a place in the courtyard by the fire.

☹ You know the rest of the story: Peter crumbles under pressure, not once but three times. His denials are deceitful and vehement. He calls down curses and swears an oath: "**I don't know the man!**"

Peter has been with Jesus for three years. He does not doubt his Master is "**the Christ, the Son of**

**the living God.”** He is always the first disciple to proclaim his loyalty, usually with the loudest voice. This very night he declared with great certainty that he would die for Christ. Doesn't Peter trust Jesus yet? This is a V-8 moment!

What is it with Simon Peter?

He has been given every advantage, every opportunity. He has so much potential. Why does he keep falling flat on his face?

☀ I believe it is because Peter relies more on his feelings than on God. Consequently:

In the storm, Peter allows feelings of doubt to crowd out his faith and literally sink him;

When Jesus prophesies his death, Peter allows feelings of dismay to provoke his presumption;

At the Transfiguration, Peter allows feelings of excitement to fuel his faulty assumptions;

At the Last Supper, Peter allows feelings of pride to overflow in the arrogant claim, **“I never will”**;

In the courtyard, Peter allows feelings of terror to determine his words, so he publicly disowns Jesus.

→ Until the LORD gives us a new one, {Jer 17:9, NLT} **“The human heart”** (our emotional center) **“is most deceitful and desperately wicked.”**

☹ Feelings that are not enlightened by God's truth and surrendered to God's will and ignited by God's Spirit are highly unreliable. Hence, one **“who trusts in him”** or herself (Proverbs 18:26 {NIV} literally says, **“trusts his heart”**) **“is a fool.”**

That describes Peter in these episodes. He trusts his feelings more than he trusts God.

Please, do not draw false conclusions from this.

♥ 1<sup>st</sup>, Feelings are a gift to be enjoyed. God has an emotional life, and experiences every constructive sentiment: affection, joy, righteous anger, sorrow, and so on. We feel because the Creator made us in his image.

♥ 2<sup>nd</sup>, Sin has corrupted the heart: but no worse than it has corrupted the spirit, mind, and body.

♥ 3<sup>rd</sup>, Feelings can be redeemed. The LORD is more than able to reorient our hearts toward him.

♥ 4<sup>th</sup>, Feelings have a high and holy purpose: to help us fully engage in and enjoy relationship with God, self, others, and the creation. However,

♥ 5<sup>th</sup>, God designed our feelings to play a supporting role in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Give them the lead (as Peter did prior to Pentecost), and your record will be hit-and-miss like his.

■ But Peter's story does not end there. John 21:15-19 reports this redemptive, post-resurrection encounter:

**Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”**

**“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”**

**Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”**

**Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”**

**He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”**

**Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”**

**The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”**

**Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time... He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”**

**Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”**

Jesus cuts Peter to the quick – and restores him. He liberates Peter from the guilt of his sin and heals his wounds of failure.

⚙ Peter remains a passionate, hot-blooded man. That is who God created him to be. Yet because of Jesus, Peter brings his emotions under the control of his spirit that is being renewed by God’s Holy Spirit, his will that is learning to submit to God, and his mind that is being transformed by Scripture.

Let us do the same.