

Follow: 4. Courage
John 21:12-17
May 26, 2019
Pastor Steve Richards

Have you seen the Antiques Roadshow on public television? If you haven't seen it, it is a group of appraisers who travel around the country, rent out convention centers, and people by the thousands bring in some object for appraisal that they have found in their home or at a garage sale. Someone will bring in an old clock, a watch, a vase, or a piece of furniture, almost anything. The appraiser will ask for some history on the object – where it was purchased or if it was inherited. Then the appraiser will talk about what he or she knows about the object, who made it, the date it was made and the general market value. Then comes the moment the owner and the television audience is waiting for – how much the object is worth. I was watching an episode recently in which a woman brought in a table that still had its original label, made in the 18th century. She found it at a garage sale and paid \$25, hoping it might be worth more than that. Turned out it was actually worth \$225,000. Not bad for a \$25 investment!

When I see episodes like that one, I begin to look at the things we have accumulated through the years in a different light. Maybe it is time for an appraisal, and not just an appraisal of what we own, but an appraisal of who we are and what we are doing. We are looking at the life of this disciple named Peter in order to understand what it means to follow Jesus. He was flawed, and yet he was trying to be faithful. If he was perfect in every way, none of us would see that it is possible to follow. But Peter with all of his flaws and shortcomings looks a lot like us – and if he could follow, so can we. If we can see how his life is better, we can see how our lives can be better.

Last week when we left Peter, he had just fled the courtyard of the high priest. Jesus had been arrested and put on trial, and Peter who promised never to deny Jesus, denied knowing Jesus. Three different times to three different people he said, "I don't even know the man." Just hours earlier he had said to Jesus, "Even if I must die alongside you, I will never deny you." And if that was the last we heard of Peter, it would have been a very tragic story. So, what happened? Peter goes into hiding, and when Jesus is nailed to the cross, Peter is not there. When Jesus' body is placed in a tomb, Peter is not there. On Easter morning when the women go to the tomb to complete the burial ritual, Peter is not there. Peter – the rock on which Jesus would build the church is nowhere to be found. He is hiding. But this is not the end of the story. He would ultimately lay down his life for Jesus. How does he get from cowardice to courage?

At sunrise on Easter morning, three women go to the tomb, wondering how they will roll away the stone that sealed the entrance to the tomb. But when they reach the tomb, the stone has already been moved, the body of Jesus is gone, and an angel messenger says **"Don't be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He isn't here. Look, here's the place where they laid him. Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you."** (Mark 16:6-7) Especially Peter. Why "especially Peter? Because God is reaching out to Peter.

It's time for a quiz. Let's go back to the first week in this series. Even if you missed that week, let's see if you can guess the right answers. **What time of day was it when Jesus first called Peter? a. about lunch time, b. in the evening, or c. early in the morning.** It was early in the morning. Next question: **When Jesus first called Peter to be his disciple Peter was... a. playing cards with his friends, b. at a night club dancing, or c. returning from fishing all**

night. Fishing all night. Third question: **When Jesus first called Peter he told him to cast out his net and Peter caught... a. nothing, b. a few fish, or c. so many fish that the boat nearly sank.** That's what happened three years earlier. Now it is weeks after the death of Jesus, and Peter has gone back to fishing. This disciple-thing hadn't worked out. One moment, Peter thought he understood but the next he didn't. His faith could be described as starts and stops. He kept trying to do the right thing, but at best his life was one step forward, one step back, and now Jesus was gone – or was he?

So, Peter went back to fishing. One evening, Peter says to the other disciples, "I'm going fishing," and the others respond, "We will go with you." They set out in their boat, fishing all night, and as on the day three years earlier when Jesus called them, this night they also caught nothing. The next morning as they head toward shore, they see a man standing by a fire cooking fish for breakfast. He shouts, "Did you catch anything?" He knew the answer before he even asked the question – just like three years earlier. "No," they reply. And the man says, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." And as they lower the net, suddenly the nets are filled with fish – so many that they cannot haul in the nest. And suddenly, the disciple John realizes this is no coincidence and he shouts, "It is the Lord!" Peter can't wait for the boat to get to shore so he jumps into the water and wades to share where Jesus is roasting fish and bread over a fire. How many times had they shared a meal of loaves and fish, and how many times had Jesus multiplied the loaves and fish to feed thousands. It was at a meal that Jesus predicted the disciples would fall away. It was at a meal that Peter said, "Even if I must die alongside you, I will not deny you." And now, it is at a meal where reconciliation would take place.

Jesus says to Peter, "Do you love me?" Jesus was seeking a commitment. It wasn't that long ago that Peter said, "Lord, I will never abandon you." But then Peter failed miserably. Every time Peter fell down, he discovered he was at the feet of Jesus. And that's right where he is in this morning's scripture. A second time, Jesus says, "Peter, do you love me?" Peter, what's your motive? Which is it – fishing or me? I've been leading you in this direction but you've turned back – you've gone back to fishing. Do you love me more than these things? And I can imagine Peter looking at Jesus and then back to what's familiar - his fishing boat, his nets, his fishing companions. And, for a third time, "Peter, do you love me?"

I remember the first time I attempted to ride a bike. I had a trike but it was time to move to the bike. I really wanted a bike, but the first time I attempted the bike, I fell down. So my dad put training wheels on my bike. And with training wheels, I didn't fall down anymore. One day, I told him I didn't want training wheels anymore. So my dad removed the training wheels. But my first attempt without training wheels was very wobbly – and I fell down. I remember asking that the training wheels be put back on the bike. I didn't like falling down. Instead, my dad encouraged me to keep trying. He knew I could ride the bike even when I wasn't so sure. So, I kept trying and he ran alongside to support me and to catch me when I fell. I was determined and dad was persistent. Why? Because we had made a commitment: Steve was going to ride a bike. It was the commitment that kept us determined and persistent.

You may remember the story of a young man who was committed to a life of public service but everything he tried seemed doomed to failure. He failed in business twice as a young adult. He ran for public office and was defeated. He ran again and was elected but had a nervous breakdown. He was turned out of office but he tried again and again. Over a period of almost 30 years, he seemed to experience one defeat after another. Finally, after a lifetime of defeat and frustration, he was elected to the highest office in the land – President of the United States. If

Abraham Lincoln had stopped and given up anywhere along the way, we would have been deprived of a great leader at the greatest crisis in our nation's history.

The fourth century Christian, John Chrysostom said, "**The danger is not that we should fall, but that we should remain on the ground.**" That's why Jesus shows up. It is commitment time! Jesus was persistent. Peter was determined. Three times he asks: Peter do you love me? Lord, you know that I love you. And Jesus says, feed my sheep. I like the way Pete the Sheep puts this. **[video]**

This is not just about Peter, but each of us. It's not just do you love me, but will you love Jesus and feed his sheep? Are you ready to make the commitment? Are you ready to get to work? Are you ready to put your words into action? Love is an action.

Not long before she died, Mother Teresa spoke to the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington DC. She was introduced to that gathering as the "greatest woman in the world." But she responded by saying: I am nothing close to being the greatest woman in the world, but I will tell you the greatest thing about my life. I've been able to be a tiny pencil in the hand of God, someone through whom God writes love letters to the world.

What kind of letter will you write to this world? God has a job for you. You are not here this morning by accident. You are not alive by accident – the fact that it is you and no someone else is not accidental. God has a job for you – you don't need great ability, just availability because God sees great potential within you. Just keep trying and if you fall down, Christ is there to help pick you up. "Do you love me?" he asks. Then make the commitment. God has a job for you. So take the life that God has given you and find your own special way to honor him and serve him with it. God wants to write a love letter to the world through you. Commit yourself this day to being a pencil in the hand of God.

Grow, Pray, Study for Week of May 26, 2019

Weekly Prayer: O God, how we love you! We want to follow you. We want our actions to demonstrate our love, and we want our words to communicate our devotion to you. Help us translate our love for you into love for all our neighbors so that the world will see your love reflected through us – and say, "See how they love." Receive our worship today as an outpouring of our love, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Monday, May 27

Scripture: Mark 10:41-45

Now when the other ten disciples heard about this, they became angry with James and John. Jesus called them over and said, "You know that the ones who are considered the rulers by the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around. But that's not the way it will be with you. Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. Whoever wants to be first among you will be the slave of all, for the Human One didn't come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people."

Observation: Memorial Day – a day meant to remember and to honor the commitment and sacrifice made by many so to win for us the kind of life we enjoy today. This is a good day to recall how Jesus defined greatness. When James and John upset the other disciples by asking for the highest posts in Jesus' kingdom (Mark 10:35-40), Jesus said they had a human, status-

seeking model in mind. But he came to serve, he said, and serving is the path to greatness in his kingdom.

Application: Ambition seems to be a natural part of almost all human hearts. But mixed motives and rewards can trigger our ambition, producing good or bad consequences. In what specific ways does choosing to follow Jesus change your approach to life? Is God growing you into a secure, content “servant” primarily motivated to glorify God and serve others?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for calling me into your kingdom. Let your love’s transforming power increasingly motivate me to live a servant life. Teach me how to treat others as you treat me. Amen.

Tuesday, May 28

Scripture: Isaiah 53:4-7, Matthew 21:33-45, Luke 22:37

It was certainly our sickness that he carried, and our sufferings that he bore, but we thought him afflicted, struck down by God and tormented. He was pierced because of our rebellions and crushed because of our crimes. He bore the punishment that made us whole; by his wounds we are healed. Like sheep we had all wandered away, each going its own way, but the LORD let fall on him all our crimes. He was oppressed and tormented, but didn't open his mouth. Like a lamb being brought to slaughter, like a ewe silent before her shearers, he didn't open his mouth.

“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a tower. Then he rented it to tenant farmers and took a trip. When it was time for harvest, he sent his servants to the tenant farmers to collect his fruit. But the tenant farmers grabbed his servants. They beat some of them, and some of them they killed. Some of them they stoned to death. “Again he sent other servants, more than the first group. They treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. “But when the tenant farmers saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come on, let’s kill him and we’ll have his inheritance.’ They grabbed him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. “When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenant farmers?” They said, “He will totally destroy those wicked farmers and rent the vineyard to other tenant farmers who will give him the fruit when it’s ready.” Jesus said to them, “Haven't you ever read in the scriptures, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The Lord has done this, and it's amazing in our eyes? Therefore, I tell you that God's kingdom will be taken away from you and will be given to a people who produce its fruit. Whoever falls on this stone will be crushed. And the stone will crush the person it falls on.” Now when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard the parable, they knew Jesus was talking about them.

I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in relation to me: And he was counted among criminals. Indeed, what's written about me is nearing completion.”

Observation: Jesus applied words from Isaiah 53 to himself in Luke 22:37. The New Testament writers took his cue and quoted Isaiah 53 more than any other verses to explain Jesus’ redemptive suffering. Jesus, they said, took the world’s evil and hatred onto himself and, through what human eyes saw as a failure, changed it into a saving force. Jesus used the image of “God’s vineyard” (from Isaiah 5:1-7) for a grim story about tenants who killed the owner’s son. Matthew said the religious leaders plotting to kill Jesus “knew Jesus was talking about them.”

Application: Those who heard Jesus' vineyard story pronounced sentence—on themselves. Today, it's easy for us to look down on those religious leaders. They heard God in the flesh tell that vivid story, knew he was talking about them, but still refused to submit to his calling. But ask yourself: to what extent am I willing to trust and submit my life to Jesus? What people and experiences have shaped, either positively or negatively, my willingness to respond to Jesus?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me keep growing into a faithful, responsive servant in your vineyard. Let me bear a rich harvest, not for my glory but for yours. Amen.

Wednesday, May 29

Scripture: Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Human One is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the other prophets." He said, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Jesus replied, "Happy are you, Simon son of Jonah, because no human has shown this to you. Rather my Father who is in heaven has shown you. I tell you that you are Peter. And I'll build my church on this rock. The gates of the underworld won't be able to stand against it. I'll give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Anything you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. Anything you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven." Then he ordered the disciples not to tell anybody that he was the Christ.

Observation: People had many opinions about Jesus. The disciples' answer to his question ("Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the other prophets") was an effort to be "positive." They knew that some hated Jesus and bitterly opposed his message. Though his faith might be costly, Peter boldly said: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Remember: "Christ" was not Jesus' last name, but the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word "Messiah.")

Application: Protestants and Roman Catholics have long debated whether the "rock" on which Jesus built his church was Peter the person, or Peter's faith in Jesus as Messiah. In *The New Bible Dictionary*, A. F. Walls wrote, "Even if it could be shown that Roman bishops are in any meaningful sense the successors of Peter (which it cannot), the passage does not allow for the transfer of its provisions to any successors whatever. It refers to the foundation of the church, which cannot be repeated." In what ways are you (and all Christians) Peter's successors? In what ways was his role unique and foundational?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, today you ask me, "Who do you say that I am?" Give me Peter's conviction and courage to say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Amen.

Thursday, May 30

Scripture: Matthew 16:21-23

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and legal experts, and that he had to be killed and raised on the third day. Then Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him: "God forbid, Lord! This won't happen to you." But he turned to Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are a stone that could make me stumble, for you are not thinking God's thoughts but human thoughts."

Observation: When Jesus told his closest followers that he faced suffering and death, Peter (outspoken as usual) tried to talk Jesus out of the idea. Perhaps he thought Jesus was just a little down, being too negative. Or maybe he was fending off the fear in his own heart as he saw the religious leaders' strong negative response to Jesus. Regardless, Jesus pushed back forcefully, telling "the Rock," "You are a stone that could make me stumble."

Application: Peter, like almost all first-century Jews, expected a conquering Messiah, a figure of intimidating power. That made it hard for him to grasp Jesus' understanding of his self-sacrificing mission. What assumptions about life, success and greatness do you have that make it harder for you to accept Jesus' teaching about a truly great human life? What has helped you move beyond those inherited cultural assumptions?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, transform my mind and heart so that I see life as you do. Give me the inner strength to follow and trust you, so that I can pray, with Julian of Norwich, "All shall be well... and all manner of thing shall be well." Amen.

Friday, May 31

Scripture: Matthew 14:21-26

About five thousand men plus women and children had eaten. Right then, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake while he dismissed the crowds. When he sent them away, he went up onto a mountain by himself to pray. Evening came and he was alone. Meanwhile, the boat, fighting a strong headwind, was being battered by the waves and was already far away from land. Very early in the morning he came to his disciples, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified and said, "It's a ghost!" They were so frightened they screamed.

Observation: Herod had just executed John the Baptist, and Jesus sought solitude as he dealt with his grief over John's death (Matthew 14:13). The crowds followed him, though, and he ended up miraculously feeding over 5,000 people. He again went to be alone, while the disciples sailed to the other side of the lake. Due to another storm, he went to rescue the disciples—but seeing a figure walking toward them on the water completely unnerved them.

Application: The story began with a sense of urgency: "Right then, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat" (verse 22). John's gospel said that after he fed 5,000 people, Jesus had to avoid a move to forcibly declare him a military leader and king (see John 6:15). Have you ever had to take urgent action to stay in tune with God's purposes for your life? Are you facing any pressures like that today?

Prayer: O God, keep me open to your presence in my world and my life. If you show yourself in an unexpected way, help me to welcome you with joy rather than with fear. Amen.

Saturday, June 1

Scripture: Acts 2:12-16, 15:7-8, 13-14; Galatians 2:7-12

They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, "What does this mean?" Others jeered at them, saying, "They're full of new wine!" Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared, "Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words! These people aren't drunk, as you suspect; after all, it's only nine o'clock in the morning! Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel.

After much debate, Peter stood and addressed them, "Fellow believers, you know that, early on, God chose me from among you as the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and come to believe. God, who knows people's deepest thoughts and desires, confirmed this by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us.

When Barnabas and Paul also fell silent, James responded, "Fellow believers, listen to me. Simon reported how, in his kindness, God came to the Gentiles in the first place, to raise up from them a people of God.

But on the contrary, they saw that I had been given the responsibility to preach the gospel to the people who aren't circumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. The one who empowered Peter to become an apostle to the circumcised empowered me also to be one to the Gentiles. James, Cephas, and John, who are considered to be key leaders, shook hands with me and Barnabas as equals when they recognized the grace that was given to me. So it was agreed that we would go to the Gentiles, while they continue to go to the people who were circumcised. They asked only that we would remember the poor, which was certainly something I was willing to do.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was wrong. He had been eating with the Gentiles before certain people came from James. But when they came, he began to back out and separate himself, because he was afraid of the people who promoted circumcision.

Observation: We'll return to Peter's later life in more detail in the next two weeks. But this peek ahead shows us the kind of leader Peter became. He let Jesus shape his bold, outspoken nature into a compelling preacher, bravely declaring the power of the crucified and risen Jesus. He forcefully spoke out on behalf of the legitimacy of Gentile believers, whom he had seen receive God's Holy Spirit without conforming to all Jewish regulations. But he also accepted James (Jesus' brother) presiding over the Jerusalem conference. He welcomed Paul to the ranks of apostles, and agreed to focus his mission in a way that didn't conflict with Paul's. We hear and read a lot about "servant leaders." We see Peter living out that kind of leadership.

Application: Would Peter have been a stronger, more worthy leader if he had required James to step aside and allow him to preside over the Jerusalem conference? If he had told Paul, "You weren't there when Jesus said I was the rock on which he'd build his church. I will preach wherever and to whomever I please. You will just have to adjust your work to that"? In whatever leadership areas you have, from the largest business or church settings to the smallest ones, how can you emulate Peter's confident and humble model of leadership? Which aspects of Peter's example are hardest for you to live out?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when I need rebuke, make me as willing as Peter was to accept it. But when I need to stand firmly for you, give me his courage and boldness. Amen.