St. Peter's Story

[RCL] Exodus 14:10-31, 15:20-21; Psalm 114;
Romans 6:3-11; Luke 24:1-12

A "dramatic" Easter sermon, as told from the perspective of St. Peter. Inspired by Luke 24:1-12.

I want to tell you about how Jesus changed my life. Long before I was called "saint" anything, I was rash, overly zealous, and enthusiastic (and not always in a good way). I often blurted out the wrong things at the wrong time. My wife was used to it and loved me anyway, my kids tolerated it, but Jesus turned it into something useful.

My brother Andrew was a fellow fisherman, and we had a pretty decent business going in Lake Gennesaret. But when we heard about John the Baptist, we had to go and see him. Much to our surprise, he pointed us in the direction of someone else, someone named Jesus. I will never forget the day my brother introduced me to Jesus because something inside me changed and opened up in his presence. Jesus possessed a kind but gentle authority that was unlike any rabbi I had ever encountered.

I followed Jesus around for a little while at first but then went back to fishing. I couldn't quite figure out what God wanted me to do, and like so many of us, I was still searching. But then the call came. And when it came to me, I had a moment of clear decision, and I knew my life was never going to be the same. Jesus called out, "Come and follow me and I will make you fish for people." My heart said, "Yes" and I dropped my nets then and there to follow him. I sometimes wonder: If I had known exactly what he meant and if I had known all that was in store for me, would I have accepted his call? It's hard to say. I guess that's why God only lets us see so far down the path of life; it's usually better to just take it one day at a time.

Now, I may not have been the smartest or most eloquent of the disciples, but I beat them all in enthusiasm. When Jesus called out to me one afternoon, beckoning me to walk out on the water to him, I jumped out of the boat immediately. And

for a few glorious seconds, I was on top of the water… walking on water! You should have seen it! All was well, as long as I kept my eyes on Jesus, but as soon as I looked away, I began to sink. Remember not to take your eyes off Jesus, especially when times are tough, because he is the one who will get you through and keep you afloat.

Walking on water aside, like most of us, I had my good days and my bad days. When Jesus asked us, "Who do you say that I am," I blurted out, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" And Jesus called me "blessed" and told me that God had revealed this insight to me. That was definitely a good day. Not long after that, however, when Jesus started talking about his death, I revolted and shouted out, "Never Lord! That will never happen to you!" Then Jesus looked right at me and said, "Get behind me Satan… you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." That was a less than good day. Back then, I thought I was ready to do battle and to fight to the death for my master. I guess that's why I was so surprised by what happened that night in the Garden of Gethsemane. I was still confused back then, and Jesus wasn't the kind of Messiah that I – or any of us – really expected.

In the garden that night, Jesus was praying and was clearly in anguish. It scared me, so I tuned out. I still regret the fact that I slept through Jesus' ordeal in his hour of need. My spirit was willing, but my flesh was so weak. Then when Judas, the leaders, and soldiers arrived to arrest Jesus, I thought it was my chance to prove myself. In my zeal, I cut off the guard's ear. But violence isn't Jesus' way, and I realized my mistake quickly as he healed it.

Unfortunately, you know what happened next. Jesus went away willingly and was tried and condemned unjustly. And while he was suffering, I denied even knowing Jesus three times. Three times. I even went and hid while he was being tortured and crucified. Yes, I was faithless and afraid. We all thought we too would be killed. And I wasn't ready to face my own death… not yet.

After Jesus died, the sadness and despair I felt were overwhelming. I had left everything to go and follow him and then I denied him when it really counted. Grief and shame washed over me in waves. I didn't know what to do. I was utterly confused – like we all were.

I wish I could say that I put the pieces together when the women burst through the door after finding Jesus' tomb empty that Sunday. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary were beside themselves with awe and explained that an angel had appeared to them and commissioned them to tell us the good news: that the Lord was not there – he had risen! Initially, everyone was dismissing their words as nonsense. But something in my mind sparked and I had to know for myself, so I jumped up and ran out the door impulsively. I ran all the way to that old tomb, and I didn't even pause when I saw that the stone had been rolled away. I ran inside headfirst. I don't know what I was expecting to see, but I understood when I saw it: he was really gone. There was nothing in there but the empty cloth that had once been wrapped around his dead body. There were no angels either, just an emptiness… an emptiness filled with promise. I was amazed and too stunned to think clearly.

I walked slowly back home in silence. Jesus had been truly dead, I knew that, but was it really possible that he was alive again? Was the impossible actually… possible?

I'm here to tell you that, yes, the impossible really is possible with God. Jesus appeared to us not long after that. And he was no ghost, this was the living, breathing Jesus, with the scars still in his hands, feet, and side. I couldn't believe it, but I had to, Jesus was really alive! He had risen from the dead just like he'd said!

But then my excitement gave way to fear: would he be angry with me for having denied and abandoned him? Suddenly my shame came rushing back with force. But Jesus didn't leave me in my shame. A few days later Jesus looked right at me and asked three times, once for every time I had denied him: "Do you love me?" And I answered him with all the feeling I had in me, "Yes Lord, you know that I do." And each time he responded, "Go and feed my sheep."

And that's what I did. Jesus forgave me and restored me, despite everything. I know that all of us make mistakes, sometimes terrible mistakes, and we all betray Jesus at some point. Shame can trap any of us in the way it did me. But Jesus didn't hold my failings against me, and he doesn't hold them against any of us. His love transformed me so that I could go back into the world and do God's work and feed God's sheep. That was my personal redemption and resurrection. Jesus transformed me from a cowardly and sinful man into the redeemed and faithful man I became. His wounds healed my wounds and by his death and resurrection, he freed me from my sin. Jesus has freed us all from the power of sin, death, and shame.

Jesus changed my life. He will change yours, too. Life can never be the same once you have met the resurrected Jesus. He is alive and he is risen! Alleluia!