

First Baptist Regina Weekly News

For the Week of April 19th



When we can finally, safely gather together again as a group, we will have to update this photo of ourselves!

The Greatest “Happily Ever After” Story

All humanity’s worst fears about itself and about God came to pass when Jesus was crucified. Humans were willing to torture an innocent young person to death for bland reasons: jealousy, politics, and fear. Is that who we truly are as a species? The cross also begged the question if there really was a good God active in this world. How could God allow this to happen?

Then all of humanity’s greatest hopes and dreams began to come true on Easter morning. God was indeed faithful and good, present and active. God was indeed making things right, and people and this world can be redeemed and transformed. That is exactly what God was doing, and continues to do, through Jesus. And a great day of restoration still lies ahead of us.

That hope fuels our work and prayer as much as does our love for Jesus - as Annabel speaks of in her sermon this week.

May God’s goodness and presence be evident to you today. May God’s love for you and your love for God nurture peace and strength within you.

Yours, with love, Pastor Joel

Mission Commission: Helping to Feed Others

Trinity Lutheran is a church in the Heritage neighbourhood, near the downtown. They are preparing and distributing packed lunches. We have arranged with them to provide muffins (cookies are ok as well) over the coming weeks. If you are finding the hours in isolation getting long and you don't mind baking perhaps this is a meaningful use of your time.

We don't want there to be any obstacles if anyone wishes to participate. The Mission Commission has aside funds to cover the cost of groceries if that would be helpful and is able to drop off groceries and pick up the baking. For more information, please contact Barb Ziolkowski.

New Small Groups

There have been a number of Small Groups running at FBC prior to COVID-19 and a few that have maintained some online connection. We are broadening our Small Group ministry in an online format during this season (using Zoom). If you would like to get connected to a Small Group – a place to deepen relationships, learn more about life and faith through the Scriptures, and engage more in actively living out your faith – please let us know and we'll get you connected. You can contact Pastor Richard at richard.fbcregina@sasktel.net.

“Do You Love Me?”

Annabel Robinson’s sermon from Sunday April 19th, 2020.

The Revelation to John 5.11-14, Psalm 30, John 21.1-19

I can say from my heart that this has been the richest Easter week I can remember. What I mean about the richness of the pandemic experience is this. It has stripped away from us every religious prop. We have no physical "togetherness," no building, no organ, no “A Time for Friends,” no dinners together. But we do have one another. We do have a shared prayer life. We do have shared worship. All this has come into focus because everything else has gone. It's like coming out on to the street after cataract surgery. Everything is in sharp focus and all the colours are brighter. Fellowship is more real than ever. Our risen Lord is more real than ever. Our love for him and for one another is more real than it has ever been. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Which brings me to the passage for today's sermon. John 21:15-19.

I don't know about you, but Peter is someone I identify with so easily.

Peter: one of the most lovable of all the disciples.

When he decided to follow Jesus, he didn't know what he was getting himself into.

He was impetuous; spoke before he thought; made promises he couldn't keep.

In the Gospels we see him low on self-knowledge. He kept trying, and failing.

He had no idea how tough discipleship would be.

But also

Courageous

Ready to try anything

Loved Jesus fiercely

Today's reading is the most intimate glimpse we have into Peter's relationship with Jesus. How do we know about this? Peter must have told John about it, who chose this, of all the other stories he know about Jesus, to share with the church. It's something we need to know.

I want to look at it in the context of 5 other short passages, 4 in the Gospels and one in Acts. When we put them together we find a coherent and moving story. Today's reading is the hinge.

First, at the beginning of John's Gospel we have John's account of when Peter first met Jesus.

John 1:41-42

The scene is beside the Jordan, where John was baptizing, and Jesus met Andrew and invited him to his home. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah." And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Peter." A rock.

Jesus "looked at him." Why does John mention this? Isn't it normal to look at a person when we speak to them? Isn't it disconcerting if they don't look?

Well, on a number of occasions in the Gospels we find that phrase. Jesus looked, really looked. He paid attention. He focused on him. And the Greek word says he looked "in" him. He saw what was in him.

If someone looks at you like that, does it make you squirm? I wonder what Peter felt.

That experience was electric enough that when Jesus found Peter fishing and called him, Peter dropped everything and followed him.

The second story takes place about three years later. Jesus is with the disciples at Caesarea Philippi, at the foot of Mt Hermon and he probes them: "What are people saying about me? Who do they think I am?" (This is one of the marks of a good teacher--make it factual and non-threatening at first. Then follow up with a pointed question.)

"Who do you think I am?"

It's Peter who answers. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Wow. That's the first time we read of anyone saying anything so clear to Jesus.

And Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

Peter knew who Jesus was, and Jesus, in a much sharper sense, knew who Peter was.

But Peter messes up. Immediately. Or, at least, immediately in the way Matthew tells it. Jesus has begun to prepare the disciples for what is going to happen. He tells them that he is going to suffer many things at the hands of the religious authorities in Jerusalem, that they will kill him, but that three days later he will rise from the dead.

And Peter takes him aside and says, "Never. We'll never let that happen to you."

And this time Jesus rounds on him with stinging words: “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 rock is now a stumbling block. He is trying to stand between Jesus and the Father's will. Peter, who had just spoken what the Father had revealed to him, is now a spokesperson for the devil himself.

Can you imagine how Peter felt now?

The third incident comes as the crucifixion approaches and Jesus speaks to the disciples in the Upper Room. Jesus has just washed Peter's feet, and explained that when he has washed them they are clean. Then he told them,

“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

But Peter was hung up on the thought that Jesus was going to leave them:

He asked him, “Lord, where are you going?”

Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.”

Peter asked, “Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”

Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!"

And then it happened.

This is how Luke tells it: Luke 22:54-62

They seized Jesus and led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them."

"Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." Matthew adds: "Your accent gives you away."

Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at [same word: he "looked in"] Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

When I was a teenager, and living in London, I used to go to the Royal Festival Hall every Good Friday to take in a performance of Bach's St. Matthew's Passion. The words of the narrative are all taken from Matthew's Gospel. When the baritone came to these last words - "he wept bitterly" - there was a long silence. Nobody moved. You could have heard a pin drop in that concert hall.

We don't hear any more about Peter until after Jesus has died.

Which brings us to today's reading, when Jesus came to Peter on the beach. The disciples, disillusioned, had gone back to their old, familiar way of life. And now they spent a whole night on the lake without catching anything.

There was a stranger on the beach who had lit a fire and was cooking fish. John recognized him, and when John said, "It is the Lord," Peter jumped into the water and raced to the shore. The other disciples followed.

But can you imagine what was going through Peter's mind when, after breakfast, Jesus sought him out, alone?

We can picture the two men, walking slowly along the shore. I suspect there was a long silence. And here is the hinge, the turning point.

When the rooster crowed, Peter had wept bitterly. Now the two men are alone, together, and Jesus sees everything.

Anyone else might have said, "Peter, what were you thinking of? Just when I so desperately needed a friend? After all I'd done for you!"

OR

"Sorry, Peter, I can't use people like you. I'm building a church. I need people who are rock solid, dependable. Sorry."

They might have said, "I never want to talk to you again."

They might have simply avoided Peter forever.

Jesus didn't say any of those things. He sought Peter out. He could see inside Peter, and saw just that, a rock. He could see the stress that Peter had been under. He could see how tired he was, how afraid, how his heart was churning with all that had happened. Jesus knew the power of the evil one. And Jesus loved Peter.

This is where true repentance takes place. Where nothing is hidden from our Lord. He sees what is in us, and we know that he sees, just like Jesus had "seen" Peter the first time he met him. When Jesus "sees in" he not only sees, but he also loves.

Then, three times, "Do you love me?"

Of course Jesus knew that Peter loved him. Right from the beginning he had seen all that was in him. But Jesus the teacher also knew that Peter needed to say that he loved him, three times. I don't know of any scene in all of literature more poignant than this. It was such a penetrating, personal question. The third time was almost too much. Peter was really distressed. Did Jesus not believe him? Did he still not trust his loyalty? How excruciating it can be to be face to face with someone you have let down.

I get the sense that Jesus had pierced right to Peter's heart.

Jesus not only forgave Peter, but renewed the commission that he had promised him previously, to build his church, not by becoming the head of a vast hierarchy, not by becoming wealthy and famous, not by

becoming a gifted organizer, fund raiser, great preacher, strategic developer . . . but by looking after and feeding Jesus' lambs.

The story might have ended there.

But it doesn't.

ACT 2. The Book of Acts, written by Luke.

You remember how, after Pentecost, Peter and John were constantly in the Temple, and how Peter healed a lame man, to the astonishment of all, and how Peter spoke to them, explaining how Jesus was the messiah foretold in the prophets. You remember how the priests "were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead," and how they put Peter and John in jail for the night. Then the next day all the big names met to decide what to do with them.

And Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, declared that they had healed the man "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead."

Hearing that, all these dignitaries, the religious leaders, Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family, saw the "courage" of Peter and John. That word "courage" translates a Greek word for which there is no exact English equivalent. The word is "parreysia" (παρρησία). It refers to speech "that conceals nothing and passes over nothing, outspokenness, frankness, plainness" and hence "a state of boldness and confidence, courage, confidence, boldness, fearlessness, esp. in the presence of persons of high rank." That's a quote from the dictionary.

And when these dignitaries, the religious leaders--Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family--saw the "parreysia" of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

What had happened to Peter? Two months previously he had sworn that he never knew Jesus. Now, after a night in jail, he proclaimed him in front of the high priests with "parreysia", and the high priests took note that he had been with Jesus.

What had happened is that Jesus had walked with him on the beach and asked him a simple question: "Do you love me?"

Jesus sees right "in us," and asks us the same question. He is the same Jesus as the one who walked with Peter on the beach. He gives us the same Holy Spirit as he gave to Peter. He "sees in" us just as he saw in Peter--our good intentions, our failures.

"Do you love me?"

If we say yes, he will change our whole life.

First Baptist Picture Wall

Do you have pictures of the congregation from over the years? Pictures of events, of groups, or of our life together? We have begun to collect these in order to fill a wall in the lower hall with pictures of the friendships and ministry of this congregation over the years. Perhaps you have been cleaning bookcases or boxes and have found some - we will take them! Call the church or write if you can help.

Tithing during the pandemic

With the COVID-19 crisis limiting contact with others and restricting meetings of groups, please do not neglect the financial needs of our church. We still have salaries and bills to pay, which amount to over \$1,000 per day!

We have several ways to provide your regular tithes and donations to the church:

1. Mail your gifts to the Church Office or call to arrange in-person pick-up. Please do NOT send cash through the mail.

2. Establish a Pre-authorized Remittance (PAR) Plan. This will automatically transfer funds from your account into the FBC Regina account on a regular basis. Please email the church or contact the Treasurer if you would like to set up PAR, or change your commitment.

3. Make an online donation:

- Use **Interac e-Transfer** to donate from your phone or computer to FBCRegina@gmail.com (*no fee or cost to the church*)

- Use a credit card or PayPal via the **PayPal Giving Fund** (*no fee or cost to the church*)

- Use a credit card via CanadaHelps (a fee of 4% is deducted from the donation)

PLEASE refer to more specific information on these contribution methods that is available on the church website. You may email the church or contact the Treasurer for further details. email the church or contact the Treasurer for further details.

With Sincere Apologies...

What did the hat say to the tie?

You hang around, I'll go on a head.

When did mathematics begin in history?

When God told Adam and Eve to go forth and multiply.

Where did Noah keep the bees?

In the Ark Hives.

Yesterday, a clown held a door open for me. I thought it was a nice jester.