

## “Wandering with Peter”

*John 12-13 Select Verses*

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**Prayer for Understanding** God of grace, your Word is like a song. It is the melody that we long to sing, the refrain that we pray will get stuck in our heads. So as we return to scripture once more, we pray that you would allow us to sink into this song. Allow us to hear the truth in between the words. Allow the cries of the crowd’s “hosannas” to feel like our own. With open hearts and open ears we pray, Amen.

As Peter and the disciples witness crowds shouting hosannas, they are confused. As we imagine ourselves in the crowd, may we remember that they are supposed to be praising Caesar, but instead they are shouting for Jesus entering the city on a donkey. Their singing is subversive, courageous, and contagious. Their praise shows the ripple effect of public displays of faith.

A reading from the gospel of John. **John 12:12-16 NLT** “The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors took palm branches and went down the road to meet Jesus. They shouted, “Praise God! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hail to the King of Israel!” Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said: “Don’t be afraid, people of Jerusalem. Look, your King is coming, riding on a donkey’s colt.” Jesus’ disciples didn’t understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy. But after Jesus entered into his glory, they remembered what had happened and realized that these things had been written about Jesus.”

At his point, the disciples are still trying to understand the meaning of Jesus the Messiah and king Jesus. The fullness of grace upon grace will only be realized after Jesus’ resurrection and his promise to prepare a space for all in heaven by the risen Jesus. There is a kind of suspension of normal time during Holy Week. We know how the week ends with Jesus resurrection, so we are able to view all that happened through a resurrection lens. We can only wonder about the coming glory, resurrection being fully manifest for all people and the entire cosmos, for our perfection, for earth and heaven being one and glorious.

If you were there, imagine your confusion. Where would you be in the crowd? Are you singing praise? Are you joining in or standing back? Are you locked in your home? Peter was likely in the parade singing courageously and full-heartedly. As we wander with Peter into this week where his faith will be tested, stretched, shattered—and then restored – let us remember how this all began with an abundant catch and a charge to drop everything and follow. Peter has walked on water and clung to Jesus for rescue. Peter has pronounced his faith confidently and been told to get out of Jesus’ way. Peter has asked questions and learned about the expansiveness of grace. And now, Jesus’ crucifixion is near. Peter stands among the crowds as they sing songs of praise. How do you imagine Peter feels? Does Peter feel exuberant to witness their praise? Does Peter feel skeptical and scared of anyone who might be trying to arrest Jesus? Is Peter thinking about when Jesus rebuked him, still wishing that Jesus’ words of crucifixion will not come true?

“Then they remembered” is the invitation to us. Like Peter we are also witnesses to the meaning of Jesus’ ministry and his kingship. What will we remember about this week? Will our “hosannas” still ring out by Good Friday or will the hard truths of the events we will witness silence our praise? Will you keep singing God’s praise through your ordeals or will you deny God by being unsure that God can redeem your situation, by doubting your coming resurrection, and skeptical of the resurrection of all? In your journey, when have you gone through a confusing and uncertain season? Have you ever found clarity by looking back on that time with a different perspective? What allowed you to understand in hindsight? What did you realize? What did you remember?

“Courage”

*a poem by Sarah Speed*

We summon every ounce of courage.

We give ourselves pep talks and we call our friends.

We dig deep within.

We practice the words out loud, rolling them around in our mouths, imagining the response.

We deal out every “what if” card our brain holds on to and spend absurd amounts of time imagining all the ways it could go wrong.

And then finally, blessedly, we say it:

I love you.

To speak the truth of your heart takes courage.

It always has.

But please, summon your courage, join the parade, and speak with conviction.

For God has been saying to the world since day one:

I love you.

What is your response?

During the Lord’s Supper, Jesus kneels to wash his disciples’ feet. When Jesus comes to Peter, we see a similar pattern unfold: reluctance then exuberance. Peter initially resists, but then Peter wholeheartedly submits. We see this duality in Peter often. Do we also see these patterns in ourselves? Peter is named Cephas which means “the rock.” In this story, we imagine that God’s grace reshapes him in the way that water softens the rough edges of stone. When we, like Peter, are reluctant and resistant to receiving love, can we remember that streams of mercy are never ceasing? We will be reshaped by grace.

A reading from the gospel of John. **John 13:1, 4-10, 12-17 NLT “Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to God. Jesus had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. Jesus got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then Jesus began to wash the disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he had around him. When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” Jesus replied, “You don’t understand now what I am doing, but someday you will.” “No,” Peter protested, “you will never ever wash my feet!” Jesus replied, “Unless I wash you, you won’t belong to me.” Simon Peter exclaimed, “Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!” Jesus replied, “A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. After washing their feet, Jesus put on his robe again and sat down and asked, “Do you understand what I was doing? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.**

Jesus washing the disciples’ feet symbolizes that God forgives all even before the disciples betray Jesus. No matter what we do, or fail to do, we are loved by God, we will belong to the family of God forever. Jesus reshapes Peter through grace like water reshapes stone. Jesus forgives Peter before he even has a chance to deny Jesus. We like Peter always have streams of mercy never ceasing and grace washing over us.

God abundantly loves everyone. We are able to love because God lavishly loves us. We are able to serve everyone, because God serves all. God serves those who deny and betray God. There is no limit to God’s love. No one is beyond God’s redeeming grace.

“With My Outside Voice”  
*a poem by Sarah Speed*

We’ve been taught to wait our turn, to ask politely—we do not want to appear greedy.

We’ve been taught: just a pinch of salt, just a dash of sugar, nothing in excess.

We’ve been taught: raise your hand, keep your voice down, no talking in church.

We’ve been taught to never make a scene, but I simply cannot abide.

I am one part questions, two parts hunger.

I am a million prayers and deep hope wrapped up in one.

I am famished and hopeful, eager and humbled.

I am using my outdoor voice inside.

I am saying, Not just my feet, but my head and my hands!

I want to go where you go.

Peter is prone to mess up, to fight, to deny, to leave, to seek safety for himself. And aren’t we all? May we lament all the ways we are prone to leave the God we love.

A reading from the gospel of John. **John 13:31-38, 18:1-12, 15-18, 25-27 NLT** “Jesus said, “The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory, and God will be glorified because of him. And since God receives glory because of the Son, God will give God’s own glory to the Son, and God will do so at once. Dear children, I will be with you only a little longer. And as I told the Jewish leaders, you will search for me, but you can’t come where I am going. So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” Simon Peter asked, “Lord, where are you going?” And Jesus replied, “You can’t go with me now, but you will follow me later.” “But why can’t I come now, Lord?” Peter asked. “I’m ready to die for you.” Jesus answered, “Die for me? I tell you the truth, Peter—before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me.” “After saying these things, Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley with his disciples and entered a grove of olive trees. Judas, the betrayer, knew this place, because Jesus had often gone there with his disciples. The leading priests and Pharisees had given Judas a contingent of Roman soldiers and Temple guards to accompany him. Now with blazing torches, lanterns, and weapons, they arrived at the olive grove. Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him, so Jesus stepped forward to meet them. “Who are you looking for?” Jesus asked. “Jesus the Nazarene,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus said. As Jesus said, “I am he,” they all drew back and fell to the ground! Once more Jesus asked them, “Who are you looking for?” And again they replied, “Jesus the Nazarene.” “I told you that I am he,” Jesus said. “And since I am the one you want, let these others go.” Jesus did this to fulfill his own statement: “I did not lose a single one of those you have given me.” Then Simon Peter drew a sword and slashed off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest’s slave. But Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back into its sheath. Shall I not drink from the cup of suffering God has given me?” “So the soldiers, their commanding officer, and the Temple guards arrested Jesus and tied him up. Simon Peter followed Jesus, as did another of the disciples. That other disciple was acquainted with the high priest, so he was allowed to enter the high priest’s courtyard with Jesus. Peter had to stay outside the gate. Then the disciple who knew the high priest spoke to the woman watching at the gate, and she let Peter in. The woman asked Peter, “You’re not one of that man’s disciples, are you?” “No,” Peter said, “I am not.” Because it was cold, the household servants and the guards had made a charcoal fire. They stood around it, warming themselves, and Peter stood with them, warming himself. They asked Peter again, “You’re not one of his disciples, are you?” Peter denied it, saying, “No, I am not.” But one of the household slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Didn’t I see you out there in the olive grove with Jesus?” Again Peter denied it. And immediately a rooster crowed.”

Peter feels the searing grief that comes with the realization that his teacher and friend will in fact die, and he is helpless to do anything about it. Peter denies his discipleship. Peter is disavowing Jesus, disavowing his own identity and belonging, denying the intimate community he shared with his fellow disciples, and denying his role as one of Jesus' disciples. Peter renounces who he has been the last three years and who Jesus is inviting him to be, now and in the future.

A resounding "I am" in response to the question, "Are you one of Jesus' disciples?" comes with great responsibility. Peter will only realize this, after Easter, when the resurrected Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" During Jesus' passion, Peter could not yet say, "Lord, you know I love you" because the fullness of God's grace upon grace had yet to be revealed. Often we need to see more of the bigger picture to embrace the call to follow Jesus—and that is okay. Peter failed and failed and failed again. And Peter kept trying to follow Jesus. Kept trying to love. Kept trying to serve. Kept asking questions. For all those times when we fail to love all people and fail to serve all people, Jesus promises to help us, Jesus promises to assist us in wrestling with our questions, Jesus promises to be with us always. God steadfast love endures forever.

Who will Peter choose to be after this? When we are confronted with who we truly are, who will we choose to be after that confrontation? Have you ever been confronted with the worst parts of yourself? How did you move forward from that reckoning?

"The Next Line"

*a poem by Sarah Speed*

There are some truths that are like the sun, if you look at them too long they may burn you.

You may never see the same again.

And yet, nothing can grow without the sun.

So we summon our courage and speak the truth of our lives.

We sing, prone to leave the God I love.

We let the honesty of those words crack our hearts in two.

We admit it to our fight-or-flight, boomerang nature, and before the grief even begins to pass, God is there.

God is turning toward us, closing the distance, inviting us to sing the next line of the song.

You are invited to follow Jesus to his death with Peter as your companion. Imagine how you might have acted and behaved had you been there as one of Jesus' followers and friends. The story is to be continued on Easter. Resurrection is coming. Amen