

Easter Sunrise, 2009

Text: Mark 16:1-8

Title: ...and Peter

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Peter had a rough weekend. It was the worst three days of his life.

First there were the prayers in the garden on Thursday night. Peter just could not stay awake. It was late. He was full from dinner, and even though Jesus needed him to stay awake and pray with Him, Peter failed.

Then Judas came with the soldiers. Peter tried to defend Jesus. He took out his sword and came within inches of a fatal blow to the neck. But Jesus rebuked Peter. He told Peter to put away his sword and stop resisting. Once again, Peter failed.

But Peter would not abandon Jesus, and so he followed at a distance to the high priest's compound. He tried to stay anonymous. He didn't want anyone to know who he was. And so when the questions started to come, all Peter could do was deny, deny, deny. Three times he claimed that he didn't know Jesus. Three times Peter chose his own life and his own safety over Jesus'. The cock crowed and Jesus' words came back to Peter. Again, Peter had failed.

Peter went away and wept bitterly. Peter cried his eyes out. How could this happen?

When Jesus was finally crucified, Peter could not even bear to watch. He didn't even show up. And Jesus died alone.

Imagine how Peter must have felt all day on Saturday. He had failed his friend, when He needed him most. He had turned his back on Jesus, denied him, and ran away in fear. Certainly there was nothing he could ever do to make up for these mistakes. Certainly there was no way that Jesus could ever forgive him.

Keep all of this in mind when you hear once more the angels' words, "'Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "

The angel says, "go, tell his disciples and Peter." Peter is the only one mentioned by name. Be sure to tell Peter. Make sure that Peter hears the good news. Let Peter know that Jesus is alive, that He is risen and He wants to see him.

The good news of the resurrection was especially for Peter.

Peter had failed. He had denied and abandoned his Lord. But the Lord did not abandon Peter. The Lord did not hold Peter's sin against him. Peter was sorry for what he had done. Peter knew

the depths of his failure. Jesus doesn't need to scold him any more. Peter has been beating himself up over this for the past three days. And now Jesus sends out this good news to turn Peter's sorrow into joy, his tears into laughter, to put a smile on Peter's face once more.

All of us here have denied our Savior. More than just three times. We have failed just as Peter has. Instead of boldly confessing and living out our faith, we have run away. We have put ourselves first.

It's easier to say nothing, or to just deny rather than to confess who we are. We don't want to stick out, to take a stand. We'd rather people just leave us alone and not bother us. We think that our faith is something private, something to keep to ourselves. We don't want to offend folks and we don't want the risk that comes with confessing our faith.

We have all taken that easy way out. Tried to blend in with the crowd, tried to keep people from knowing who we really are. Instead of trusting that Jesus will take care of us, use us for doing some good, we'd rather play it safe.

When we realize what we've done, the result is sorrow and despair. "How could I have messed up so bad? How could I have missed this opportunity? How could I have done this and caused my Lord so much pain?" You may have even wondered, "Can God still love someone like me? Could He possibly forgive like me?"

The answer this Easter is a resounding, "Yes!" The good news of the resurrection is for you.

There's no one outside of Jesus' love. Jesus loved Peter, despite his faults and his failings. Jesus loves you. Jesus rose from the dead for Peter and for you, so that you will have eternal life.

So what? You might ask. What difference does this make for me today?

Yes, I know that I'm going to heaven one day. I know that I'll be with Jesus when I die. But I've got mortgage payments to make and hospital bills to pay. My body seems to be falling apart. My family is a mess, and sometimes I have problems even getting out of bed in the morning. What difference does Jesus' resurrection mean for me and my life today?

That's a good question. Too often us church folks are so busy talking about the hereafter, that we fail to address what this means for the here and now.

And here's the answer.

First, the resurrection makes a difference because now we know that this world is not all there is. There's more than just this life.

If all we have hope for is this life, this world, what we see around us every day, then it would be very depressing. If we had to face our jobs and our health and our family life knowing that this is all there is, to grow old and die, then you would have every right to be selfish and caught up in all the worries and stresses of the world.

But the good news of the resurrection is that there's more. There's a new life waiting for us. We don't have to face each day as though we were counting down to our death. Instead, we are counting forward to our new life.

Since we know what the future holds, that changes how we look at our present life.

You may lose your house, but you will never lose the heavenly home prepared for you by Jesus Christ.

You may lose your savings, but you will never lose the treasures stored up for you in heaven.

You may lose your health, but you will never lose the glorified body you will receive in the resurrection.

You may lose your loved ones, but you will never lose those who belong to the Lord, as we will all be reunited in heaven.

You may go hungry here on earth, but you will never hunger or thirst at the heavenly banquet.

Know that all these things will be yours changes how you look at things and how you react in difficult times. You will have a difficult time here on earth, but Jesus' resurrection means that there is something more, that there is life beyond this dying world.

Furthermore, you don't have to wait until you die to receive all of this.

Your new life starts now. It's not just some future thing that comes when we die and go to heaven. Your new life starts today.

You have a home here in the church, a place where you are always welcome.

You are always rich here at church, as the Lord fills you with the riches of His grace.

You are always loved here at church, by the Lord who died and rose again for you.

You are always receive spiritual healing, as the Lord binds your wounds and makes you whole and strong.

You are always with your loved ones here, as all God's people are gathered at His table.

You are always fed here with Jesus' own body and blood.

Through the gifts you receive here, the Lord blesses you and preserves you, He give you these things to strength your faith and keep you strong until the day when you receive everything more that is waiting for you in heaven.

As the Lord sends you from this place today, you will meet many Peters. Your life is filled with folks who have denied Jesus and abandoned Him. At one time they belonged to the Lord, they were baptized, maybe raised in the church, but at some point they have denied Jesus and turned their backs on him.

This resurrection message is for them, too, and the Lord is sending you today to tell them that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, to tell them that Jesus still loves them and cares for them. His new life is for you and for all of them, too, new life that begins here and now, and continues forever.

Christ is Risen!