

## Peter the Rock

St. Mark Lutheran  
Three services

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This morning I am starting a series of six messages based on a series called "Walking With Those Who Walked With Jesus" by Rev. Richard Pfeil.

To start, let me share a quote from the Augsburg Confession, one of the foundational documents of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: "Our churches teach that the remembrance of the saints is to be commended." Now many people who are familiar with the abuses in the Medieval Church concerning the worship of the saints might be surprised by that statement.

But Philip Melancthon, one of the leading theologians at the start of the Lutheran Church, gives us at least three reasons why a study of the saints' lives is very appropriate. First, he says it is good for us to recognize and give thanks that God gave such gifts to the Church as these people we now remember, recognizing that they used their gifts in service to him. Second, there are lessons to be learned by the study of their lives which should strengthen our faith. Third, they all had their weaknesses, and yet we will come to recognize in studying their lives that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more (Rom. 5:20). This should serve as an encouragement to us.

It is probably fitting that we should start our series on the disciples with Peter. He was one of the disciples that was very close to Jesus. He was there when Jesus was arrested in the garden, and he came to Jesus' defense. He trailed behind Jesus all the way up to the area where Jesus was tried.

I thought we might have a little fun today and see what you know about Peter. My first question is worth five points. You can even keep count on your bulletin this morning. What was Peter's occupation when Jesus called him to follow Jesus. ANSWER: He was a fisherman. What was the name of his brother who was also called at that time to be a disciple? ANSWER: His brother was Andrew. That's worth ten points. This apostle is referred to as "Simon" and "Peter" in the Gospels, but there is another name for him that is used once. What was it? ANSWER: It was Cephas. You just earned 15 points if you got that right. In what city was Peter put to death by crucifixion? ANSWER: We believe he was killed in Rome. That's twenty points. Do you know in which year this took place? ANSWER: It is generally believed that it was 64 A.D. If you had the correct answer you get twenty-five points. Here's the last question. In which city was Peter born? ANSWER: If you knew Bethsaida, you certainly earned your thirty points.

I have chosen Matthew 14:22-32 as my main text for today's message. It gives us a good example of Peter's life in general. As Rev. Pfeil put it, "It really does describe Peter at his best and sometimes at his worst."

Matthew 14 informs us that shortly after the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus dismissed the crowd and told the disciples to get into their boat and go on ahead of him to the other side of the lake. Jesus went up on a mountainside to pray. By evening, the boat was a considerable distance from the land and was being buffeted by strong waves because of the wind.

During the fourth watch (between 3-6 in the morning), Jesus went out to the disciples walking on the water. When the disciples saw someone walking on the lake toward them, they were terrified. That sort of thing wasn't expected to happen. Jesus calmed them by saying, "Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid." (verse 27)

Peter recovered quickly. He said, "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water." Jesus' answer to that was "Come." And Peter got off to a good start. He got out of the boat and started walking on the water toward Jesus. He was doing well.

But then Peter lost his focus on Jesus. He saw how strong the wind was and began to focus on that and the waves and became afraid, and he began to sink. "Lord, save me!" he cried out. (verse 30) Immediately, Jesus reached out with his hand and caught him. The Lord said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those in the boat worshipped him and said, "Truly, you are the Son of God."

One special thing about Peter was that he asked many questions. He was drawn to Jesus and he wanted to know more and more about him. He seemed to have an unquenchable thirst to know about God and related things. In Matthew 15 he wants Jesus to explain the parable about clean and unclean things to him. In Matthew 17 he is concerned with how many times you have to forgive a person. In Matthew 19 he tells Jesus that the disciples have left all to follow Jesus, and he wants to know what's in it for them. In Mark 11 he is curious about why the fig tree that Jesus had cursed was withered. In Luke 21 he asked who Jesus was referring to when he said we should be watchful. In John 12 he wants to know where Jesus was going and why Peter couldn't come. Peter wanted to know Jesus, and Peter wanted answers to his questions.

Peter is a good example for all of us here. How do we grow spiritually? We grow by seeking the truth. We grow by asking questions in your Sunday classes and in your small groups. We grow by asking questions of your pastors and other informed Christians. We grow by reading and studying the Bible and asking somebody when you don't understand something.

Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6) Peter certainly had his faults, but Peter wanted to know what it was all about. How about you? When people look at your life, do they see someone who has a thirst for knowledge about the Lord? Or do people see someone who wants to go to heaven but hopes to get away with just enough to get by? It makes a huge difference. It makes a difference in your life and it makes a difference in what you can accomplish for the Lord. Peter had his faults, but Jesus made Peter, a fisherman, into a fisher of men.

It is also instructive for us to realize that Peter had a main weakness. He was too impulsive. He often reacted before he thought things through. That was part of the problem in his walking on the water. He knew the weather was windy and the waves were high. If he was going to think about that, he should have done so before he went out on the water. I bet some of us have failed like that at times. I know I have.

There were other occasions. In Mark 8, Jesus tells the disciples some very bad news. He says that he is going to go to Jerusalem where he will die. He is going to be crucified, but he will rise again. I doubt that Peter even heard the part about Jesus rising again. For Peter began to rebuke Jesus. According to Matthew 16, he said, "Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!"

What did Jesus think about that? Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Wow! Think about that. Peter believed that Jesus was the Son of God, but at that particular moment, his words were serving Satan. Isn't that scary? Can that happen to any of us if we are not careful? I believe it can. As Christians we need to be careful about what we say.

But there is no question that Jesus loved Peter. He would correct him when necessary, but he was patient with him. Jesus understood what a force for the Lord Peter could be. Just some time before that he had asked Peter "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter had responded correctly and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Jesus said, "Blessed are you Simon, son of John, for this was not revealed to you by man, 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 hell will not overcome it."

Jesus said this of a man who would later, on three occasions, deny that he even knew the Lord. But the same man just days later stood out on the streets, preaching about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and about three thousand people came forth to be baptized into Christ. Jesus made Peter into a rock through the ministry of the Word.

He will do the same for us also if we will but follow him. He knows each of our weaknesses, but he loves us and is patient with us also. He had a promise for Peter, and he has a promise for us also in John 7:38: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." Jesus is a life transformer. He made Peter into the kind of Christian who was as solid as a rock, and he can make rocks out of us also. With joy, we remember the Apostle Peter today as a changed man who served his Lord well. We also note that we, like him, probably have our own weaknesses, and need to make sure that Satan does not exploit them. Amen.