

Good morning, thank you Rev. Rob and Deacon Susan , and to all of you.

- my name is Matt O'Connor
- Linda Flynn and I have been members here at St. Barnabas since 2018, we live in Avila Beach, we're both spiritual directors, and Linda also provides supervision for directors
- many of you might remember me as that person asking for your reflections for our parish's Advent and Lenten booklets, that has been a wonderful way to get to know how rich and thoughtful this community is

- I'm a graduate in the Diaconal Studies program at the Episcopal Seminary at The Claremont School of Theology, and I lead people in the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.

So,

1. Thank God for Peter

- The authors of the gospels seem to **save Peter** for all those situations where **only he will do**. He seems almost like a device they used; he can appear, at least at first, as comic relief, **one misadventure** after another.

- **Jumping** out of boats **at the sight** of Jesus; actually walking on water one time **until he realizes** what he's doing; or lopping off the ear of a slave **as Jesus is getting arrested in the garden;**

- but there's one thing **you have to give** Peter, **in his passionate way he never left never any doubt** about where he stood.

-
- But **what Peter truly is, is one of us**. And thank God for it. Because **in his periodic** bouts of foot in mouth, or in his **everyday habit** of going off-script, and, **in general being Jesus'** resident loose-cannon.

- **Peter is just like me and you**. Like a lion one day, **missing in action** the next; **ready to go to prison** or even die for Jesus, **then**

denying ever having heard of him; and today, he 'rebukes' Jesus for upsetting his idea of what a Messiah was supposed to look like.

- All this . . . is to say, **that the Peter we know** in the gospels **is there to hold up a mirror for us to better see ourselves.**

2. Why So Harsh?

- **All this begs** a question. **We know** how the story turns out, but in the moment, **why was Jesus so harsh** with Peter, after he, **true to character**, got **so spectacularly wrong** what Jesus was saying.
- Peter 'rebukes' Jesus because he wanted no part of what Jesus was saying. My "Messiah," rejected, suffering, dying?
- This was not what Peter had in mind. In calling Jesus 'Messiah,' **whether then or now, we sign on to a story whose ending we think we know**, and **we're really okay with that;** everything fits into place **just the way we like it;** our 'Messiah,' **amazingly, is exactly like we've decided** it should be, **and then. . . .** like Peter, **we're 'good to go.'**
- **But Jesus got so mad** at Peter because, he **can not allow** him, or us, **to get this wrong.**
- Peter rebuked Jesus because he was **invested in a narrative of his own making**, and Jesus was not having any of it. **Peter couldn't let go of what he had decided** Jesus as the Messiah was **going to do, for him.**
- **But, as usual, Peter** was only saying **what everyone else was thinking**, including you and me, **had we been there.**
- We, **don't like hearing the things** Jesus was saying. Abandoned? Rejected? Suffering? **We want our Messiah** to be the **hero, not a victim;** and we **especially don't like having** our illusions

shattered, **where what we've pinned** all our hopes on. . . . **turns out nothing like we had thought.**

- **I think Jesus responded like he did** because he saw **in Peter's resistance** how **tenuously his message was being grasped**, **how easily** it could be misunderstood. **And especially**, how **tragic it would be** for his entire life's **purpose to go unrealized.**

- **Because when Peter or you or I react with a "That's not what I signed up for," we're missing a most important point we're saying " . . . what you're asking is too hard, I'm not strong enough, or brave enough, or willing enough but in doing that,** we're **misreading what lies at the heart of Jesus' message;** because **it's not anything being taken FROM us, it's what's being offered TO us.**

- **Jesus knows** our human **nature;** he knows **his teachings don't make much sense** to anyone **who hears him say things like,** 'let them deny themselves," or " . . . "take up their cross," or "lose their life **for my sake and for the sake of the gospel.**"

- **"Thanks, but I think I'll pass too."**

- So **why should** Peter, or you, or I **choose to follow Jesus** when **what he's offering seems not to be in our best interests?**

3. Downward Mobility

- **A priest named Dean Brackley** wrote a paper several years ago called *Downward Mobility*, **where what's at stake becomes clear.** He **describes two** opposing approaches, **what he calls strategies, towards living,** 'Downward Mobility' and 'Upward Mobility.'

- **It's these two strategies Jesus was talking about when he railed at Peter about setting his mind** "not on divine things but on human things."
- **Upward mobility** is just **what it sounds like**, it's the direction **our egos naturally gravitate towards**.
Safety, security, possessions, the acclaim of the world, they're the stuff of "human things."
- **Picture a ladder**, Brackley **calls it a 'social ladder,'** the way our culture creates those at the top, secure in their wealth and power, and **those at the bottom rungs of the ladder**, where **the outcasts go**.
- **Our country provides** so many examples of **the inhumanity of this social ladder;** just **one is to compare** the vast concentration of **wealth for those at the very top rungs**, with the fact **that one in five children here live in poverty**.
- Upward mobility, **by its nature**, **casts us all in** competition with each other, **"I want more, I need more,"** and **in the process I lose sight, in fact I literally don't lay eyes** the poor wretches below me.
- **Jesus never took his eyes** off those bottom rungs.
- **There's a really good program** here on the Central Coast I'm involved with called **Restorative Partners**. Their programs focus on meeting with incarcerated woman and men in the jails and in juvenile hall.
- **I was privileged**, until Covid put it on hold, to meet with men at the county jail. We'd **start with a small prayer service**, then **sit together to listen and share with each other**.
- **When I first started going**, I kept thinking, "what **can I possibly have say to them, I've got nothing they'd want to hear**." Having never been anywhere near a jail cell, **what could I possibly offer to these guys?**

- **That right there is the social ladder. If not for the program, I never would have laid eyes on those men, I never would have been given the privilege of hearing their stories, or watching their tears when they spoke of children and missed chances.**

- **One evening, there was some delay getting started, and I was sitting with three inmates just talking about whatever. One, named Travis, the one with the devil horn tattoos on either side of his forehead, was telling us about his dog, how he'd tuck it in his jacket when he rode his motorcycle. Just then the Sister I worked with walks up and says, what are you guys doing? Travis says, "just chopping it up."**
 "Chopping it up" means holding deep conversation. When he said it, the four of us, plus the Sister, busted up laughing together. For at least a moment or two, the boundaries got erased.

- **So much for thinking** it wasn't in my best interests.

- **So WHY was** Jesus so harsh on Peter?

- **Every action Jesus took, . . . and in every word** he spoke, Jesus is telling us about God's kingdom, what it looks like, how to build it, where to find it.

- **He can't help himself, he knows this thing and he wants to share** with whomever will listen. **And this is it,** Jesus' whole life's purpose **comes straight from** his experience of God. **Specifically, from being God's beloved, the God whose joy it is to love, a God who longs for nothing so much as closeness** with us, a God **who loves us without measure and without regret.**

- 'Downward Mobility,' **is about a direction Jesus wants to take us, not** because it's the harder way, but **because it's how his strategy is brought forward. And that strategy of Jesus says,** no one's left behind, no one's deemed expendable, **and there is no such thing as 'them.'**

- **Solidarity** is the **outcome of such a strategy. How?** To make sense of *downward mobility*, **we have to take a closer look at what it puts into motion — it's not about anything** being taken,
..it's all about **what's being given. And that's love.**
- **God's love**, a love for each one of us **that erases barriers and has no bounds.** This kingdom **starts with love**, the love of a God **who wants** only for us to **live in freedom THAT COMES FROM knowing we are THE BELOVED.** This love is of a God who has no interest in **judging** us because **that would take time away from cherishing us.**
- **This is the God Jesus knew**, and it's the God who **asks us to seize our** chance to **participate in this irrational, non-sensical, implausible kingdom.**

To head downward is to go to a very specific location, and **we'll know we're in the right spot if we find** Jesus there.

Turns out, Peter was right all along to go leaping out of boats to get to where Jesus was.

- We **don't deny** ourselves, or **shoulder our cross**, or **lose ourselves** for the sake of the gospels **because it somehow makes us more noble** We do these things because it's how a certain kind of love occurs, the kind God's kingdom is built from.
- **It's how the widow** and the **orphan** and the **stranger** are brought back into the fold; it's **how we're inspired to make sure our table always has room for "just one more."**
- You **only deny yourself** because it's **easier that way to embrace someone else**; you **take up your cross** because **you actually can —** because of the **blessings love has** showered you with.

To **lose your life for Jesus' sake** is to lose **any remaining vestige of shame or disgrace**; it's to reject anything that **gets in the way of you knowing your belovedness.**

Your own experience of **how God loves you, 'no matter what,' creates in you an identity of worthiness** leaving you — **unshackled, to be in the world who God is, free to love as you are loved, without measure and without regret.**

- **Sustaining all this** is a God who is **constitutionally unable** to be **disappointed in you** because, as a **mystic who lives in Los Angeles** writes, **“you’re exactly what God had in mind when you were created.”**

4. **So was Peter, in this moment of Jesus rebuking him, just what God had in mind?**

Yes he was, and so are we.

- **These are the ‘divine things’** Peter was missing, and Jesus got so hot at him **not because he got it wrong,** but for **what he was afraid Peter was going to miss out on.**
- **See, I think Jesus** is really **touchy** about this **because he knows human nature,** he knows **we can get stuck,** like Peter, **in our heads,** when what **he’s really speaking to are our hearts.**
- Jesus **wants us to see that** downward mobility, the **denying and taking up and losing,** all the **stuff we don’t like the sound of,** is not as an **end in itself** but is how **the kingdom of God moves forward, and, coincidentally, where our joy is.**
- **I go back to Peter,** who surely does **give us hope,** but **for a little different reason** than before. **I imagine the scene** when Jesus, after he’s **calmed down** a little, **takes Peter aside and says,** “Peter, I can’t have you miss this, you’re not about to lose anything, I’m trying to give you everything I know and love.”

- **This is why** Jesus got so **worked up** — he *needs* **Peter**, and **know for certain**he *needs* **us** not to miss what he's offering if this **love** is going to **be a reality in our world**.

- _ You, you who are **God's beloved, sought out and found in your unshakable goodness,**. . . . are just the person to be in the world a **vision of the God** whose love you have come to know.