“And Peter”
Mark 16:1-8

Easter Sunrise Service
United States Naval Academy
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Welcome & Introduction

I think it was Oscar Thompson, great evangelist who said “relationship,” is the most important word in the English language.

There are a lot of wonderful relationships here, and we pray that this Easter would be an occasion for you to enter more deeply into relationships with other believers, and most importantly with Jesus Christ, in whose name we gather today.

If you don’t have a church home, we’d love for you to consider the Chapel.

Text

I believe that some of the most important words IN ALL OF THE BIBLE are spoken in our Gospel reading this morning.

Mark 16:1-8 – The account of the Resurrection of Jesus

We’re told:

• On the very first day of the week, after the sun had risen...
• Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Salome…tomb where Jesus lay…spices
• Stone had been rolled away!
• Entering…they saw a young man dressed in dazzling white, (Angel)
  o Don’t be afraid
  o You’re seeking Jesus of Nazareth
  o He was crucified but NOW HE IS RISEN
  o See the place where they laid him...
  o But go! Tell all his disciples AND PETER that he is going on before you. And there you will see him, just as he told you.
• And they went out trembling with astonishment…for they were afraid.
Now Mark is the one who writes this account; and I’ve always liked Mark. If Mark was a staff officer in the Navy, his Commanding Officer would’ve loved him, because he gets right to the point.

His gospel is the shortest of the four and his account of the resurrection is the most succinct.

What’s more, tucked in the story are two of the most important words ever spoken and two words that have everything to do with you and me today.

Let me read in verse 7 again (paraphrase):

And the angel said to them...Jesus is risen... So go! Tell all the disciples AND PETER that he is going on before you, and there you will see him, just as he told you.”

Perhaps you caught it - in the midst of the great and universal proclamation, a proclamation that would change history forever, the angel singles out one man by name who especially needs to hear this good news – Peter.

Go! Tell all the disciples AND PETER...

Of all those who were grieving Jesus’ death that Sunday morning...lost and filled with regret, Peter was in the greatest despair

You see it was Peter who denied that he knew Jesus – not once, not twice, but three times – and this - during the last hours of Jesus’ life when Jesus would need his followers the most.

We can be sure that those hours between Friday and Saturday night were some of the most difficult of Peter’s life.

Body

Perhaps you know the story of Peter’s fall. It was really more gradual than immediate. It began at the Last Supper.

1. The Gospels tell us that during that last supper:
   • Jesus - “All of you will fall away because of me.”
   • Peter – “Not me Lord! I will never fall away; even if I have to die with you, I’ll never fall away!”
   • Jesus - “I tell you the truth Peter, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”
Jesus knew Peter. He knew that for all his good intentions, whenever a man trusts in his own strength, sooner or later, he’ll fall away.

To be sure Peter meant every word he said...

   Peter loved Jesus
   Loyal
   Often fearless, stepping out in faith when no one else would
      It was Peter...boat
      Peter...confessed Christ

But his brashness also carried the seed of his downfall.

*Behind this well-intentioned statement that he would never fall away...sin of pride.*

PRIDE: “An over-estimation of one’s own strength.” And it can show itself in many ways.

Now there’s certainly a good kind of pride...

   Pride in our nation, children, job well done

But we’re talking about that pride that causes us to think too highly of our self or our abilities...that blinds us from our own weaknesses

EX: A Minister tells the story of a woman who went to see a counselor for help.

   At the first appointment, the counselor asked the woman to tell about herself...which she did. He asked her to come back the next day, and again for the entire session she spoke about herself. Well this went on repeatedly for some time. And so finally after weeks of this, the counselor said:

      😊 “My advice to you ma’am is to take the first train to Niagara Falls and there take a long look at something bigger than yourself.”

That’s what pride is. It’s an overestimation of our strength or importance; and although it can be countenanced by good intentions. Ultimately, it’s a failure to recognize our weakness, a failure to trust in God.

This was the first step towards Peter’s fall...

   ...and us as well...
How often we have set ourselves up for failure because we subtly believed that BY OURSELVES we were sufficient for the task; that in OUR OWN STRENGTH...we can do it.

Proverbs 16:18 – “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

And any of us who’ve ever let pride blind us (that’s all of us)...we know this is true 😊

Pride goes before the fall – this certainly was the case for Peter

2. Peter’s second step towards his failure was his lack of prayer...prayerlessness

We’re told that when Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane

- He called Peter, James, and John to pray
- Three times he came to check on them, and three times – fast asleep!
- And so when the hour of crisis came and Jesus was taken away, Peter wasn’t ready. He’d not prayed. His spirit was willing, yes. But his flesh was weak.

Likewise, prayer readies us for crises – it actually strengthens our spiritual muscles so that when the moments of testing come, we’re ready to act

EX: The great general, Napoleon, “Battles are not won on the battlefield, but the conference table in planning meetings before the battle is ever begun.”

Our spiritual battles are not usually won in the midst of temptation, but well before it, where we put on the whole armor of God in prayer...ready ourselves and shape our souls before God

Martin Luther was reported to have once said: I have so much to do today, I’ll have to spend at least an hour in prayer 😊

Now, that’s a tall order...but his point is that prayer is not only a reaction...our daily bread

Peter had failed to pray...

3. Finally Peter demonstrated temperamental tactics...and this was his last step towards his great failure

The Gospel accounts tell us that when was finally aroused from sleep to the approaching mob, without thinking he drew his sword and cut off the ear of one of the officials.

To which Jesus responded, “Peter put your sword away...do you not think that I cannot appeal to my Father and he will not send legions of angels? But how would the scriptures be fulfilled?”
You have to love Peter: Here he was - sound asleep, and then the moment he wakes, starts swinging his sword wildly ready to do battle for Jesus

Again, right intentions, but wrong methods

Peter had fallen into the temptation of using the world’s methods to carry out his desires

Rather than prayer and love and patience for his enemies, he took matters into his own hands and forced the issue. And Jesus rebuked him for it.

And we do this as well. How many people in our own lives have we hurt or wounded because we took matters into our own hands?

Rather than listening, or seeking to know where we’ve gone wrong, we launch out and say things, do things we regret. We try and prove our point rather than hear the deepest needs of those with whom we have conflict.

I’ve always loved the prayer attributed to St. Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, the faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
And where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;  
To be understood, as to understand;  
To be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Peter would go on to learn this…but on this night, his temperament would get the best of him

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Pride, prayerlessness, and hasty tactics…all of these were like bricks that paved the way to Peter’s fall.

Now it should be said, to his credit, he was the only disciple that didn’t run away…
“...Followed at a distance.”

But when the hour of testing came, it would prove too much for Peter.

As Jesus was led away to be tried and condemned, three times Peter was asked if he knew Jesus...and three times he denied he ever knew him

* You were with Jesus! - “I do not know the man!”
* This man was with Jesus of Nazareth! – “I do not know the man.”
* Certainly you too are one of them! – “[I swear], I do not know this man!”

...And at that moment, the rooster crowed and Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him, and he went out and wept bitterly.

EX: The movie, “Interstellar”

* Movie about a team of astronauts and scientists who are sent to look for other planets in light of the fact that our planet is dying.
* Powerful Scene: Main character played by Matthew McConaughey is forced to pilot his spacecraft into a massive black hole with no hope for return
  o As he moves further and further in, and as the laws of gravity begin to crush in on his vessel, the lights on his console begin to fail one by one.
  o He looks out into the void of dark cold space – “It’s black, it’s all black...darkness.”
  o He’s alone

I imagine this is what Peter felt during those awful hours on Friday and Saturday after Jesus’ death – blackness, it was all darkness.

For three years, he’d walked with Jesus, listened to him, learned from him, hoped He would be the one to redeem Israel

Jesus has changed Peter’s life

But now Jesus was gone; and with him every hope redemption...

And the weight of sin and regret, the darkness of death began to crush Peter’s spirit

...and he was plunged into the black hole of grief and sorrow

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But then came Sunday morning 😊 and the report of three women that Jesus was alive!
Can you imagine the scene...women - disciples?

“We’ve been to the tomb...he’s not there. A man in white, an angel told us to tell all of you, ‘Jesus is risen.’ And Peter, he especially wanted you to know...!”

“Go...tell all the disciples and Peter...risen”

-If ever there was anyone who needed good news it was Peter!
-If ever there was anyone who needed a word of Hope it was Peter
-If ever there was anyone who needed to know that the weight of sin was forgiven and a new day had dawned it was Peter
-If ever there was anyone who needed to know Jesus was alive, it was Peter

Thesis

You see, the resurrection is not only the great cosmic event in all of history; it’s also God’s specific word of redemption and forgiveness for each one of us.

The truth is, we’ve all failed our Lord like Peter did:

   Maybe we’ve not denied Jesus in our words, but certainly our actions
   
   What we’ve failed to do, or failed to say
   
   How we’ve failed to live
   
   “All we like sheep have turned away” (Isaiah 53:6)
   
   “All of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)
   
And because of this...we all need a specific word of love and grace and forgiveness from our Lord telling us:

   ...there’s Hope and a new beginning....
   
   ...telling us that HE knows all about it...HE can begin again

The resurrection is God’s gift given to each one of us by name

Conclusion

Don’t we need this gift?

To every one of us whose known the darkness of our own failures, the disappointment of own denials – that Angel speaks today.
“Jesus Christ is risen for you!

Go tell the disciples and Peter...

And Carey...And Margaret...And Richard...And Susan

Fill in the blank with your name!

On this Easter morning, don’t just come to a worship service; but hear the Angel say speak to you.

Jesus Christ is risen!

No matter what has gone before in your life, no matter what you’ve done, or how far you’ve fallen, with Jesus there is forgiveness and a bright hope forever!

Jesus is alive!

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer:

O Son of God and Son of Man, who by Your victory did conquer the grave, raise us up from despair and loss of hope and deliver us from the darkness of unbelief and doubt. Set our affections upon the things above that we may have a good and fruitful impact upon our families, our communities, and this institution that we serve. On this day we pause to render our praise for all of life’s resurrections. For new hopes and new opportunities, we give you thanks. Send Your Spirit into our hearts, in the name of the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.