



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Midweek Lenten Worship  
Pastor Randy Ott

### **Peter, the Born Leader**

There are probably no two more similar people in all the history of Jesus' Passion than the two people that were cut from the same cloth, so to speak, and those two people would be Peter and Judas. They both had positions of leadership within the disciples. They both relied on their own abilities. They both started out with a fervent love for Jesus, yet their ends are radically different. Why are they different? Why does Peter, the born leader, who is so much like Judas, not end up the same way as Judas does? I think it's an interesting thing for us to consider and maybe see, hopefully in Peter, ourselves and learn from him so we don't have to learn the hard way.

I think it's fair to say they are cut from the same cloth. They both had positions of leadership within the disciples. Judas was the Treasurer. He had to have some skills and some resources. He seems to have had the ability and that's why he was put in charge of the money purse of the disciples. Although I don't think they had an election and elected Peter President, but it sure seems like whenever someone had to speak, he is the one that Scripture records for us that spoke. He's the one that spoke up and was the voice of the followers of Jesus. He gave voice to what was in their hearts, their concerns, their troubles, and sometimes it was amazing. When Jesus asked, "Who do you say I am?" they give all these answers about all the different things that people were saying, but he said, "Who do you say I am?" and Peter steps forward and hits it over the fence. "You are the Christ. The Son of the Living God." He confesses his trust that Jesus is the Promised Messiah. So then Jesus goes on to teach him what the Promised Messiah was going to do, and now Peter fumbles, right? He rebukes Jesus and tells him "I'll never let that happen. You aren't going to die. That's not what my Messiah is going to do." Jesus has to tell him, "Get behind me Satan!" He's courageous in faith and he's clumsy in faith. When his eyes are on Jesus, he can walk on water. When he starts noticing the waves and the wind, then he starts to sink. That is essentially what happened to him on Maundy Thursday evening, the same exact thing.

The guy that had this born leadership ability to speak and to act and to be decisive, none of that helped him when Satan came and asked to sift him like wheat, to shake him to see (like the chaff is blown away by the wind and the wheat is left behind) if Peter was going to be chaff. Satan no doubt wanted to show God that this is what he was, that he was like Judas. He professed faith in Jesus but when push came to shove, he was going to run. And that's what he did to start with, right? Yes, he drew the sword, but he was operating under his own idea of what a messiah should be, not what Scripture had said. He is kind of a lot of what we talked about in last week's

Sermon...people that don't live in the light but want to stay in the darkness of their own preconceived notions and ideas. That's Peter to a T. "My Messiah can't die by this mob's hands, so I'm going to take out my sword and stop it." Jesus has to rebuke him again. Then he runs away with the rest of them. But not as far away as the rest of them. Even when Jesus had warned him about Satan and how he was going to sift him like wheat, Peter said, "All these guys, they might leave you. They might flee. They might deny you. I never will." He doesn't listen to the warning and understand it. Instead he looks at himself and says, "The possibility of me doing that? It can't happen. I'm bigger than that. I'm better than that."

You know what happened. He followed at a distance but when the opportunity came to stand up and speak that Jesus was the Promised Messiah again, now he says, "I don't know the man. I don't know the man. May I go rot in hell if I know the man." The last time he even calls down curses on himself.

At a time when he could have spoken, when he was looking at himself, his mouth was shut. All his bravado, all his gusto, all his courage, it was nothing. This born leader was a failure when push came to shove. Then the man that he said he didn't know looks across the courtyard, looks him in the eyes, and Peter realizes that what he was standing on was not the solid rock. What he was standing on was himself, and his nickname crumbled. He went outside and wept bitterly because he saw what he had done. He was exactly what Jesus had warned him. But he didn't listen to Jesus. He looked to himself and in himself he found, right then, nothing.

So how is he different from Judas? Judas wept bitterly. Judas was very sorry that he had denied and betrayed his Savior. Judas gave the money back, like you heard earlier. But Judas despaired and went out and hung himself. What is different with Peter? Is there something different in Peter? No. The only thing different about Peter is what was in Peter and at this point in time. It was still the spark of faith, still the Spirit living in his heart by faith. The Spirit was the difference because even though, when he looked to himself, he crumbled, there was still that spark of trust that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. That look from his Savior, the words of warning from the Savior, the Savior perhaps even telling them "I prayed for you and when you return, I will restore you brothers," telling him that he would fall but God himself would lift him back up, maybe that came flooding back to his mind and that led him to turn not away from God in despair but to cling to God because he saw hanging onto himself was nothing. All his cockiness, all his bluster, all his bravado got him nothing. He needed to learn the humility of relying on God and relying on the Savior.

When Jesus restored him and brought him back in and told him to go out now and teach this message, Peter did it. He preached the most amazing Sermon in Acts 2 on Pentecost. This isn't Peter talking anymore. This is the Holy Spirit working through Peter. This is the Holy Spirit using Peter. This is Peter relying on someone bigger than himself, someone outside of himself. All his born leadership traits meant nothing until he learned to rely on God and not on himself.

So what do we learn from this? Hopefully we've figured out that we have to learn humility, to rely on God and not on ourselves. Hopefully that's obvious to us. There are probably times in our lives when we get all full of ourselves and think we can do anything, and every now and then things happen that just knock us down and remind us we can't do it all. We can't do everything on our own. We need someone bigger than us. So hopefully we learn that lesson of humility and learn it from Peter without having to have something so horrible in our life as knowing that we denied our Savior like Peter did. Think of how he had to endure that at various times, how Satan threw that back at him.

But his only answer was the only answer that you and I have to give for the times that we have failed our Savior. Jesus took all those sins to the cross and they are washed away in the blood of the lamb, and in our baptism we are clothed with Christ. In the Lord's Supper, we receive his body and his blood to assure us of this forgiveness so that we can go forward and not rely on ourselves.

I think the other thing that we should learn is that Peter was rubbing shoulders with Jesus day after day, yet when push came to shove, he relied on his idea of the Messiah and not on the words of Jesus. Jesus had looked him in the eye and said, "You're going to deny me. Satan wants to sift you like wheat. I've prayed for you. When you fall, I'll restore you and come back." It went in one ear and out the other because he had his own preconceived notions about himself and about his Messiah.

Think about how often we are like that. We talked this last Sunday about living in light and not in darkness. We live in darkness when we stick to "it seems to me" instead of getting our rear end into Scripture and seeing what God says. Yet this week again, I get filled up to my ears with "I don't think that's right. I have no Scriptural reason for why it's not right, but I just don't like it and I don't think it's right." Get out of the darkness and get into the light of God's Word. If you can't do that, then you're on a path that's not going to be pleasant.

Peter had to learn to rely on God. Learn from him and don't take so long.