

FOLLOW ME
Luke 22; John 21

Intro: Scottish poet, Robert Burns, who lived in the late 1700s wrote a poem about the mouse whose nest he plowed up as he worked his field. He commiserates with the mouse who has just lost her home and philosophically compares it to the plight of humanity. The poem is entitled *TO A MOUSE*, and his original is written in the Scots dialect which is almost understandable. I'll spare you that and give you the modern English rendition of the last two stanzas because they apply to my talk today.

*But little Mouse, you are not alone,
 In proving foresight may be vain:
 The best laid schemes of mice and men
 Go often awry,
 And leave us nothing but grief and pain,
 For promised joy!
 Still you are blessed, compared with me!
 The present only touches you:
 But oh! I backward cast my eye,
 On prospects dreary!
 And forward, though I cannot see,
 I guess and fear!*

Burns talks about good plans and honest intentions that have been torn apart like a little mouse nest in the Scottish sod ripped up by the farmer's plow. Our plans do, indeed, often go awry and that was certain for Peter. He is the latest in our Rebooting series and we'll look at how he talked big and got squashed small and then how Jesus rebooted him.

But first some background:

Emily introduced me to the Enneagram test the other day. Maybe you've heard of it, but if you haven't, it is, as described by Wikipedia, "*The . . . model of the human psyche which is principally understood and taught as a typology of nine interconnected personality types.*" I love personality tests and they always describe me almost perfectly. Always until I took the Enneagram. I think it was wrong. But that's beside the point, because, if the disciple Peter had taken the Enneagram, he would have been a cross between 7, which is THE ENTHUSIAST, described as the Busy, Fun-Loving Type: Spontaneous, Versatile, Distractible, and Scattered and 8, which is THE CHALLENGER and is described as the Powerful, Dominating Type: Self-Confident, Decisive, Willful, and Confrontational.

This was Peter. He was a talker and since he was always talking, sometimes he talked first and thought later. He was impulsive, so that he was the kind that would definitely try to get out of a boat and walk on the water – even though, as a fisherman, and having been around water his whole life, that had never been possible before. He also was swift to defend Jesus and lop off a man's ear in the process. Peter was a big, lovable, intense personality, full of bluster and empty of fear. Peter had good intentions, but miscalculated his strength. I had you read a lot of background scripture from Luke 22, which is a very long chapter, and John 21, which is the final chapter of that Gospel. Today I'm only going to focus on three very small portions of those two chapters, so I hope you have done the assignment, but if you haven't, you can follow it up later.

Luke 22 records the events of the first Maundy Thursday. Jesus and his disciples have celebrated the Passover Meal. Imagine a festive time like Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter all rolled into one and you will have an image of how special and joyful Passover was. Jesus and his 12 disciples were a tight bunch – like family with all the love, banter, and bickering that happens in a family.

Jesus had begun the time in a puzzling way by washing their feet. He was the rabbi and they the students, but he demonstrated servant leadership by doing a lowly servant's task on his disciples.

During the sacred Passover meal he had instituted the first Communion as he passed the bread and spoke of his broken body and the cup and spoke about his shed blood. After these two things they were really wondering what was going on with their rabbi and friend.

But they reverted to their usual selves by arguing over who was the greatest. This was just a short while after, all things considered, Jesus had taught them by his very actions that they should all be servants of the others because no one was greater.

Then he commended them for their faithfulness to him as he had ministered – even through trials and struggles. Then we get to Peter who Jesus refers to by his given name, Simon, and that’s where we pick up our first text. Listen,

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.” Luke 22:31-34 (ESV)

Whoa! What’s this about Satan?!

Sometimes sifting happens

- What does Jesus mean about Satan demanding to have Peter? Well, we can be assured of this, Satan is only active as God allows. We can see that in the Book of Job which is loooooong sermon series for another time. But suffice it to say now, that we face life’s struggles because God allows it to happen. What does this sifting mean? Harold Martin says this, *“The “sifting of wheat” means “to shake” and “to toss to and fro.” Sifting was for the purpose of removing chaff or foreign substances. Satan sifts us by means of temptation, hoping to remove us from the Lord’s wheat.”* Satan wasn’t interested in anything good to come out of the sifting – he only wanted to derail the redemptive plans of God.
- Peter figured strongly in those plans and Satan wanted none of it. But Jesus allowed it, all the while praying that Peter’s faith would not fail. Think about that: Jesus does not want us to fail – in fact, he is pulling for us to succeed. But he knows that sifting will bring strength. And not only that, after Peter has been through it, he will have the strength to help his brothers and sisters with their own strengthening process.
- But Peter misses the point. He hears Jesus’s words as a challenge, and he promises, *“Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.”* (v. 33). This is recorded in all the Gospels, and Mark’s version is even more blustery, *“Even though they all fall away, I will not.”* Mark 14:29. I’m not gonna let you down Jesus! Even if everyone else does, good old Peter will not!
- Some people never learn. But Jesus knows that. *“I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”* (v. 34) And I’m certain Peter’s reply (since he always had a reply) was, *“You just wait and see!”* Well, he would see – and it was through eye’s dimmed with tears.
- Fast forward a few hours to the kangaroo court where Jesus is being illegally tried by the religious leaders.

Listen,

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly. Luke 22:54-62

It was . . .

Episodic Memory

- Those kinds of events that are seared into your mind for the rest of your life. Imagine Peter’s sorrow. Imagine his gut wrenching despair at the realization of what he’s done. What can ever redeem him from this?!
- Jesus! Jesus can redeem him! But, I’m getting ahead of myself – let’s look at this denial thing a bit.

- G Campbell Morgan, preaching over a hundred years ago says this of Peter. It's long, but it is so powerful, so soak up these words. Remember he's talking about Peter:

"Let it be said at once his faith did not fail. His faith did not fail when he was denying his master. Neither did his love fail. What did fail? His hope, and therefore his courage. When Peter came to write a letter long after, he broke out into doxology; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3 KJV)

Hope was dead, and when hope is gone, courage fails, and man becomes a coward. Jesus knew his faith would not fail. He knew how deep he was going, but listen to this:

"But when once thou has turned again, establish my brethren," that was our Lord's confidence in his restoration. And Peter said, and he never said a finer thing,

"I'm ready to go both to prison and to death.

He meant it. But Christ quietly said,

"I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, until thou shalt deny that thou knowest me.

. . . In effect our Lord said, "I know you will deny me before the morning breaks. I know you as you do not know yourself, Simon. I know the weakness and the cowardice incipient in you; and I know where it will lead you in the dark hours ahead; but I have prayed for you and you are coming back; and when you are come back, establish your brethren."

- In Jeremiah God is telling the people of Judah who are in far off Babylon that they will not be leaving their imprisonment anytime soon, so they should bloom where they were planted and he gives them this promise, *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.* Jeremiah 29:11. Even in our sifting, he has a plan for us and he gives us hope. Because if you lose hope – you slip into despair. (Share the discussion Kathy and I had about people worrying during this Ukraine crisis and deciding it was those who had hope in Christ who had peace in their heart about it.)
- Peter's hope was dashed when he saw Jesus looking at him. Now, don't judge Peter too harshly because, in similar circumstances, we would likely do much the same. Besides, when we sin, which is, by its very nature, denying Christ, imagine the look of Jesus as we do.
- But, I think I know what that look was here in Luke 22, it was a look that said, *"You're being sifted Peter, and I'm pulling for you and you will make it though and I'll see you on the other side."*
- In modern parlance, Jesus was saying, Peter, bring it in for a reboot.
- Listen to the final text that describes that,

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me." John 21:15-19

- It was . . .

An after breakfast reboot

- Remember the background: The disciples were at Galilee and they were fishing. Peter, being a man of action, says *"I am going fishing."* And the others, not having anything better to do, said, *"We'll go too!"* And they went and they had what almost all of my fishing trips have been, DEVOID OF SUCCESS! No fish. Until they see Jesus on the beach and he tells them to cast their nets on the other side. And then they caught so many they could barely drag it in. The first time they saw him, three years before, he had told them they would be fishers of men. Now he is going to commission Peter of be a shepherd of men too. F.

F. Bruce says this: *“What is important is that Peter reaffirms his love for the Lord and is rehabilitated and recommissioned. The commission is a pastoral one. When first he was called from his occupation of catching fish to be a follower of Jesus, he was told that henceforth he would catch men Mark 1:17 and Luke 5:10. Now to the evangelist hook there is added a pastor's crook so that as had often been said, Peter proceeded to fulfill his double commission by hook and by crook. How seriously he took this second commission may be gathered from 1 Peter 5:1-4 where, speaking towards the end of his life as an elder to fellow elders, he urges them to shepherd the flock of God so faithfully that they would receive an unfading garland of glory at the manifestation of the Chief Shepherd.”*

- You cannot help but notice what everyone else does here. Peter denied Jesus three times and now Jesus reinstates him three times. F B Meyer says, *“Christ thrice questioned Peter's love, thus giving him the opportunity of canceling his threefold denial. There are two Greek words for love. In his questions our Lord chose the higher (which is agape), while Peter, in his replies, humbly chose the lower (which is phileo), till in his third question our Lord came down to Peter's level. Christ forecasted the hatred and opposition of the world, and suggested to Peter and the rest that the only way to combat and overcome was in the fervent love that they had for him. Only this could give them the necessary tenderness and delicacy and leading and feeding the flock.”*
- Peter was also striving to not fall back into his old bravado that was so prevalent before his denial – so he is refraining from over-committing to a love stronger than he thought he was capable of. Agape love is a tall order and he didn't want to come up short again. But notice Jesus's confidence in Peter. He knew what Peter would do and he triple commissioned Peter back into the kingdom plan. Peter had been sifted and he had been pulled in out of the deep and now he would follow that call to “Follow me!”

Conclusion: Peter was rebooted. He was still Peter and he would still score a 7/8 on the Enneagram. But now he would use his gift of talking to bring a message that would see 3000+ people come to faith in Jesus the Risen Lord just about a month later. And then he would have the courage never deny Jesus again and he would say, *“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”* Acts 4:19-20. And he would indeed go to prison. And he would indeed die for his Lord. So he did keep his blustery promise from Maundy Thursday night. That's the beauty of what happens to us when God is in charge of our rebooting. Amen.