

Rev. George Arceneaux

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Pentecost 13

This morning, I keep getting drawn back to the first lines of Isaiah which feel like is a pretty good place to be centered as I'm up here for my first Sunday as your rector.

Those lines from our Hebrew Bible read, "you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug." It feels like God was showing up to remind me, I think remind us, of how we are called to be. As I hear it, they remind us that if we want to follow God's call, as a church, as individuals, as St. Christopher's, that reading seems like its saying it would be a good idea to look to the rock from which we were hewn and, as it so happens, our Gospel tells us what that rock is. Specifically, Peter. So what does Peter and this Gospel story have to tell us about what we are called to do at St. C.'s?

Peter is, to my mind, the big St. Bernard puppy of the New Testament, is the disciple that charges head first into everything he does and it feels like every single time, he makes a mess. It's like Jesus is looking at him saying, "no, Peter please, don't dig up the garden, don't piddle on the carpet, don't deny me three times, wait! No! Stop! Please!.....ughh... I'll get the broom.

Peter misinterprets Jesus' parables, he shuts down kids who want to come to Jesus.

Even after Jesus' resurrection, Peter doesn't stop messing up as he loses a big theological fight with Paul. Peter gets it wrong just about every single time. And while I

rather like thinking about Peter as a puppy... and I make light of these failings... a lot of them are really pretty serious. The greatest of Peter's failings of course happened on the darkest day of our faith, the day of Christ's death. The day that Peter denies Jesus. The day that Peter knows his failure and the day he broke down. And wept.

Why... why is this the disciple Jesus chose as the foundation of the world's largest religion?

You know, thinking about all the ways that Peter messes up, it kinda puts me in a weird head space where I think about all the times I have messed up, if you want a good catalogue of that ask my wife Fiona. But of the numerous times I've messed up I kept thinking this week about this one time when I was here at St. Christopher's. If you don't know, I was the intern here from January of 2018 to January of 2020. And there was a Sunday when the rector at the time, Eric Biddy, was out for some reason. And so, (watch out Bob) our associate priest Bob Wyatt was running the day, I was there to be the thurifer and do the intern thing. And I am haunted by a mistake that day. You see, when we get to the Gospel in the service, traditionally it's supposed to be proclaimed by the deacon or at the very least, someone who has been ordained. Well we finish up the second reading and we don't have music that day, it's a spoken service, and we get to a period of silence. And Bob, I mean, he's been doing this a while, I'm not saying you're old, I'm saying you're wizened. Well in my anxiety and arrogance thought, "there's no way he's making space for reflection and silence. He's waiting for me to do the Gospel!"

And so I stand, and immediately regret every choice I've made leading up to my getting my butt out of my seat, because that second I KNEW I had messed up. So I read the Gospel and sat down with my heart racing and feeling so much shame. And guilt.

Now like I said, this haunts me, the feeling I had that day on that level of "wakes me up two years later and I stare up at the ceiling at 2 a.m." sorta of thing. But here's the thing. Bob never mentioned it. Neither did any in the pews. I brought it up with Bob and surprising probably no one, instead of the hurtful words I had internally slung at myself... calling myself stupid, and unable, and foolish... Bob laughed and with that sort of Tennessee love that makes him not just the best kind of priest but the best kind of man, he assured me it was no big deal.

People from St. C.'s offered that kinda of love every day when I was here. And I really believe that kind of love is always out in the world, just as it is still in here.

Peter messed up again and again and again. And again. But our Gospel this morning shows WHY he's the rock of the church. Because when the most important question came up. When Jesus asked who he was, Peter knew that Jesus was the embodiment of that God who loves us unconditionally. The sort of love Jesus continually offered Peter is the same that Bob offered me after my own goof that Sunday past, the same love that St. C.'s has offered me and the same sort I know persists in the world and in you today. It's the same love that is always offered by God and the rock upon which our church was built was a man who always returned to that love.

Peter's example reminds us that in the face of our shame or guilt or mistakes. In the face of when we hurt others, when we disappoint ourselves, when we backslide into patterns of anger or self-obsession or self-condemnation we may look to the rock from which we were hewn. To the man who knew that no matter what we do nothing can separate us from the love of God. So, let us as a church work to love others as Jesus loved Peter and be open to that love ourselves. Amen.