



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

I Want to Follow Jesus but I'm Scared The Second Sunday of Lent 2282021

Good morning and may the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us be with us this day, and remain with us always. Amen.

Are you good enough, friends? Are you someone upon whom God can place trust? Are you someone who, if this were some 2000 years ago, would you be someone who would follow Jesus? Do you ever find yourself wondering that? Would I have said yes, I will go? Yes, I have decided to follow Jesus. Some days when I find myself wishing that I had been alive then so I could have seen Jesus. I could have heard his words. I could have witnessed his miracles and had my faith cemented into my soul and henceforth be completely and utterly impermeable to the doubts of any day.

On those days, I believe if I had lived then, I would have followed Jesus. I would have said yes, I would have been with Him through it all. I see my energy, passion, and leadership skills and I think, wow, I could maybe even have been one of the women who funded his ministry that we hear about in Luke's Gospel. And maybe, maybe I could have walked the countryside with Jesus, envisioning a whole new world. And then maybe I might have had the guts to be present at the Cross and to go to the tomb. Maybe, I think I could have been one of His amazing followers.

And then I remember reality. I remember that I am pragmatic and tactical, moderate, and someone who is and can be pretty risk averse. And then I'm glad that I was born almost 2000 years later because I'm pretty sure that I would have said no to Jesus. I cannot imagine me with my five-year plans, long term goals, and career aspirations seeing someone walk by, hearing their call, and then just dropping everything and following them. And even if I did say yes, would I have understood what He was saying? Would I have understood His call and His invitation to sacrifice and love and change? Would I have gotten it right? I don't know. I probably would have blown it.

And then I read more of scripture. And I began to think about the apostle, Peter, and that's when I turned to Peter the Rock. And I think, well, hey, maybe there is room for me, maybe friends, there's room for all of us. Peter says yes and follows Jesus, but it is not a linear ascent to sainthood to be sure. And up until today's reading from Mark's Gospel, we haven't really even heard or seen much of Peter in the early chapters of the book. We know that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-

law when they stayed overnight at Peter's house. But in the gospel thus far, he hasn't spoken.

And then in the halfway mark, between the call and the crucifixion, Jesus gathers His apostles together and He asks them, who do people say that I am? And a number of them call out different answers. Some say, some people think you're John the Baptist up from the grave and others think that maybe you're Elijah and that you have returned just before the fire of the Lord. And then someone else chimes in, some people think that maybe you're one of the prophets from old, maybe Ezekiel or Jeremiah or Isaiah back from the dead.

Yes, but who do you say that I am? And then in that silent air, Peter says you are the Christ. You are the Messiah. And I just imagine that these words just leap from his gut. And now it's done. And now it's out there. You are the one for whom we've all been waiting. You are the one who will change everything for everyone. Peter says that. And in Matthew's gospel right after he says that that's when Jesus says that, and from now on, I will call you the rock and upon you I will build my church. Peter has done it. He has named Jesus as the one. And I imagine in that impulse of blurting out of the truth, I just imagine this so that Jesus turns and nods to him in agreement, and then asks him not to say anything. As Peter receives this, I can see the joy and the pride and the sheer delight that must envelop Peter. He's got it right.

But Peter's glow doesn't last too terribly long because then Jesus begins to lay out what it means for Him to be the Holy One, the Messiah, and that Jesus will suffer, that He will be tortured, He will be killed, and that He will rise on the third day. But Peter stopped hearing after Jesus said that He would die. He's like, no, no, no. Stop it now. And I can imagine Him grabbing Jesus and turning Him and looking at Him and saying, no, no, you've got this all wrong.

And you know that feeling when you've finally said what you most fear? When you make yourself so vulnerable and speak your truth, the courage that it takes, that's what Jesus has just done. In this massively human moment, He has told His closest friends, His fate and His fears. And Peter who just moments ago had completely understood, cannot tolerate His words. And it's then that Jesus just pushes him aside and grabbing Peter and his words, and then tossing them as far as He can from his heart and says, "Get behind me, Satan."

Connection, empathy, vulnerability, dissonance, pain, and anger. It all just happened. And Jesus cannot tolerate Peter's fears. Peter has blown it and that connection he had with Jesus is gone. And Jesus is furious that Peter who had understood now has completely misunderstood. And then, so the others are not confused, He goes on to explain in very explicit, very clear terms how each of them, if they're going to follow Him, how each of us, if we are to follow Him, must turn and face Jerusalem and pick up our cross if we're going to follow Him. And

understand all that we will lose if we choose to do this, and ultimately all that we will gain if we dare to do so.

And if the story ended there, I would turn and I would walk away. And I would say like, Peter, I have no hope of doing this. I am too afraid, too risk averse, too strategic, too myopic to understand. If the story ended here, I would not be doing my best now to follow Jesus. But the story continues on. Six days later, Jesus specifically invites Peter, get-behind-me-Satan Peter to go with him and James and John, up to the mountain top where Jesus is transfigured and Peter sees all of it. And does Peter completely understand? No, but Jesus does not give up on Peter. Jesus never gives up on Peter.

Does Peter later deny Jesus? Yes. Peter continues to be massively human, but in the end it is Peter who goes to the far reaches of the earth, telling the world that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, died, and risen. It is Peter who works miracles after Jesus ascends to heaven. And it is Peter who is eventually crucified for his belief in Jesus. Jesus never gives up on Peter. And in the end, Peter does not give up on Jesus.

Friends, truly following Jesus scares me. To be a follower of the Holy One demands so much more than I think I can give, more than I think I can love, and more than I think I can do, and failing terrifies me. And yet, what I know is that God has called me. And that God is calling me and that God has called you and God is calling you. Not to be perfect. Not to be amazing. Not to get it right every single time, but to never, ever give up. Our world needs Jesus and Jesus needs us, just as we are, all that we are from this time forth and forever more.

Amen.

[End of Recording]