

"Peter's Legacy: Incarnation"

1 Peter 2:4-12

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Simon Peter: there's so much you can say about him. According to the Gospel of Mark, he and his brother Andrew were the first two followers of Christ. He was the first person in the Gospels to confess his sinfulness and the first person to confess that Jesus was the Christ. His name is mentioned more than any other name in the New Testament except the name of Jesus. His name is mentioned nearly two hundred times! There is so much you can say about him.

But you can also sum up Peter's life and his legacy, I believe, with just three words. And the first word is the word invitation. Peter heard one. He heard an invitation that came to him from Jesus Christ. And when he heard Christ's invitation, he listened to it. He didn't reject it. He received it. He responded to it. He followed its direction for his life. And his life became more than the life he had known before the invitation came, the life he'd made for himself. His life became what the invitation said it would be.

For the invitation came in two parts. "Follow me." That was the invitation. But after the invitation came the promise. "Follow me, and I'll make you become ..." something more. More than the man you've been in the past or the man you are now. More than the fisherman you've taught yourself to be. "Follow me and I'll make you become" more. "I'll make you become a fisherman who fishes for the souls of men and women."

"Follow me." That was the invitation. "I'll make you become ..." That was the promise. And because Peter accepted the invitation, a process began, a process that would turn the life of Simon bar Jonah into the life of Peter, the Rock.

Jesus kept leading. Peter kept following. Not always perfectly, but persistently. Peter kept following. It was the power of the invitation that did it. It was the power of the invitation that kept Peter following. And if you are willing to believe it, the Bible says that Jesus has an invitation to give to you too. It's the same invitation. "Follow me," Jesus invites you. "Follow me," and let me make you become more than the person you are now. Let me make it happen for you just like I did for Peter. Follow me. Listen for my invitations to you. When you hear them, accept them. Do what I ask you to do. And I'll make your ordinary life become a life that leaves a legacy behind it just like the life of Peter. The first word that sums up the life of Simon Peter is the word invitation.

But to sum up the life of Simon Peter, you need a second word as well. You need the word inspiration. Because receiving and responding to Jesus' invitation and its promise wouldn't have made a lasting difference for Peter apart from the Day of Pentecost. For on Pentecost Peter received the power that turned Jesus' promise into a reality in his life.

He received the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It came like the rush of a mighty wind, filling his mind with wisdom and understanding. It came like a tongue of fire, resting on him, filling his heart with strength and passion. It sent him out into the streets of Jerusalem.

The Spirit's inspiration guided Peter to do that. The Spirit's inspiration gave Peter the strength to go out into the streets of Jerusalem. The Spirit's inspiration gave Peter the courage to proclaim in public what he had denied in private in the courtyard of the High Priest less than two months before. The Spirit's inspiration gave Peter the plan and the power that enabled him to turn the promise of Jesus into a reality in his life.

And on the Day of Pentecost after praying for the Spirit and waiting for the Spirit, Peter spoke words that brought dry bones to life in Jerusalem. And the Book of Acts says that "on that day about three thousand people were added to the number of believers." Because with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Peter fished for and caught their souls.

"Follow me," Jesus had told him, "and I'll make you become that kind of a fisherman." And Peter listened to Jesus' invitation. That was the first step in transforming the ordinary life of Simon, the fisherman into the life of Peter, the apostle.

"Wait in the city," Jesus told him for the Holy Spirit. And Peter waited. He waited until the Holy Spirit inspired him, guided him out into the streets of Jerusalem, and gave him the strength to stand there and fish for men and women.

The word invitation, the word inspiration; these are the first two words that transformed Peter's life. And they have the power to transform my life and your life too. If you let them, if you let the words do their work, the work of turning your life into more than your life. For your life was never meant to be just your own life. It was meant to be more than that. It was meant to be a life that makes a difference. It was meant to be a life that leaves a legacy. And it can be, if you learn how to walk in a straight line. Let me explain.

Last fall, a story was broadcast on NPR. It was part of a news program called "Morning Edition." The story was put together by reporter Steve Inskeep. And it started out in a pretty surprising way.

"For some reason, human beings can't walk in a straight line! There's just something about our inner orientation," the story said, "that causes us to go crooked, to walk in a warped way!"

The story was based on study done by Jan Souman, a scientist from Germany. He blindfolded his subjects, then asked them to walk for an hour in a straight line. Without exception, people couldn't do it. "Of course everybody *thinks* they're walking in a straight line, until they remove the blindfolds," Souman says. Then they see how crooked their path has really been."

And, according to Souman's research, there's only one way we can walk in a straight line: by focusing on something ahead of us ... like a building," he says. And that's exactly where Peter says we need to keep our focus too.

"Come to Him," Peter says, walk towards Him. "Come to the living stone, rejected by human beings, but chosen by God and precious to him." And know this. As you do that, "you too, like living stones are being built into a spiritual house."

Keep your eyes focused on the building, Peter says. If you do you'll be able to let go of the crooked line that is a human life left on its own, a human life without any real direction of purpose except its own satisfaction and its own pleasure. Let go of the crooked line that represents your life as you look back at it. Turn around. Focus your eyes in a different direction. Focus on what's in front of you and what lies ahead of you. Focus your eyes on Christ and what he wants you to become.

That's the message of 1 Peter chapter 2, and it's a message that comes from the heart. For Peter knows it's true. He knows that accepting the invitation of Christ, the living stone can change your life. He's experienced that. He knows the inspiration of the Holy Spirit can transform your life. He's seen it happen to him.

But Peter also knows one more word. It's the word incarnation. He knows that God's great desire for a human life is that it would become an incarnation of His life. An incarnation of His wisdom and His word, an incarnation of His law and His love, an incarnation of His holiness and His mercy, an incarnation of His goodness and His grace. God's great desire for a human life is that it would become an incarnation of His life. The God of the universe wants to live out His life in and through your life!

Does that thought surprise you? It shouldn't. For Peter says whether you know it or not, whether you live it or not, "you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,

God's special possession." And because you belong to God, His life is tied up with yours, just like the life of a Father is tied up with the life of a son or a daughter.

Lee Strobel is a father. And a few years ago in a sermon entitled "The Case for Christ," he talked about what it used to mean to him to be a father and what it means now. Here's what he said.

"How can I tell you the difference God has made in my life? My daughter Allison was 5 years old," he says, "when I became a follower of Jesus Christ. Up until that time, all she had known in those five years was a dad who was profane and angry. I remember I came home one night and kicked a hole in the living room wall just out of anger with life. I'm ashamed to think of the times Allison hid in her room just to get away from me.

But five months after I gave my life to Jesus Christ, that little girl went to my wife and said, "Mommy, I want God to do for me what he's done for Daddy." At age 5! What was she saying?" She didn't know all the theological concepts. But she knew this. "Her dad used to be one way: hard to live with. But more and more her dad's becoming this way: more like Christ. And if that's what God does to people, then sign her up. So at age 5 my daughter Allison gave her life to Jesus too.

And God changed me as a father, Lee says. He lived out His life in me and it changed my family. It changed my world. It changed my future for eternity and I will be forever grateful."

And Peter was too. He was forever grateful to the God who changed his life too. How about you? Have you let God change your life too? He can, you know. He can make you become more than the father you are now, or the mother you are now, or the son or the daughter you are now. He can do it through three words. And the words are the words that are written all over the life of Simon Peter. The words are invitation, inspiration and incarnation.

Listen in your life for the invitation of Christ. When you hear it, follow it. Do what He tells you to do and remember His promise. I will make you become more than you are.

Wait for and trust the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in your life. If you do, the Spirit will speak to you. He will call you out of darkness and into the light. He will guide you and strengthen you so you'll be able to walk a straight line in a crooked world.

And let God live out his life through your life. Let Him become incarnate through you. Let His holiness become incarnate through your life so the world can see what holiness really looks like. Let His goodness become incarnate through your life so the world can see what goodness really looks like. Let God live His life through your words and your acts.

That's what living a life that leaves a legacy is all about. Let's pray ...