

We all know that Easter is a major Christian Holiday. We know that the Easter Story is about the death and resurrection of Jesus. And some of us know that Peter, Simon Peter, is a key player in the story.

This morning, I want to suggest that this Easter story and Peter, Simon Peter, has a larger meaning than the resurrection of Christ. I want us to consider that this is a story that has played out through the ages and has important meaning for us today. I want to address the story from the vantage point of Simon Peter.

Let me provide some historical perspective. Simon, named Peter by Jesus was one of the originals. He was one of the first disciples. According to the synoptic gospels, he was probably the head disciple, always mentioned first in the lists of the Twelve Apostles and in the Book of Acts. Peter is the spokesman at several events. He is frequently mentioned in the Gospels as forming with James the Elder and John a special group within the Twelve, present at incidents where the others were not. Both Catholic and Protestant scholars agree that Peter had an authority that superseded that of the other apostles.

Simon, later to become *Simon Peter, and later yet, Saint Peter*, was an early Christian leader who at the beginning of the story is a mere fisherman, along with his brother Andrew who also became an Apostle. This Peter, regarded as the first Pope by the Roman Catholic Church, preached to scattered communities of believers, Jews, Hebrew Christians and gentiles alike, and worked to establish the church of Antioch.

St Peter, continues as an important character in both the Christian and secular world. He's the guy in jokes, cartoons, and comedies, caricatured as the "keeper of the keys to the kingdom of heaven". He is often depicted as an elderly, bearded man who sits at the pearly gates of heaven and personally interviews prospective entrants.

One last historical note. I want to quote from the Book of Acts. The writer is said to be Luke, writing to *all* that love God. The Book of Acts is about the acts of the Apostles in the context of the life and works of the church.---primary among the themes is the idea that God's promise of fulfillment is achieved in the ministry of Jesus, significantly aided by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

I want to read an important sermon Peter delivered, an open air sermon I believe, noted in Acts 10:34-42

34 Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by

hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. All prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. “

Two verses here stand out for me. #35 and 42.

Verse 35: but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. And #42: All prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. “

Fears him, is not as we use the term today, but means one who believes in God and who follows God. And in verse 42, “receives forgiveness of sins” to me means, has an opportunity for a new start, a re-do, a do-over.

In this Easter story, Peter is a perfect example of someone who gets a reprieve, has an opportunity for a new start. Lets remember, Simon, named Peter by Jesus is a hand picked disciple. His naming was probably no accident—Peter means the rock. Peter, the very same disciple who three times denies he knows or is a follower of Jesus, later becomes a pillar of the church.

So Peter goes from a nobody fisherman to an Apostolic spokesperson, to a Judas of sorts and then full circle to being known as Saint Peter. That’s an amazing story line, an unforeseen life’s journey, a hell of a resume! It’s a story of great fortune, a story of optimism. It’s a story about a man who does good, believes in good, and a man who, maybe out of fear, lies, strays or fails. It’s a story of redemption. A story we should all be able to relate to. For who among us has not strayed, or maybe out of fear, lied? Who among us hasn’t failed? Who among us has no need for redemption?

That’s why I tell this story this morning. Because we as humans are always in need of redemption of some sort for one reason or another. We trip, we fall, we hide in fear, we lie, we deny what we’ve done or believe. We cover our backsides in hope of being safe. And all too often, we know exactly what we’re doing while we’re doing it...and we know it ain’t right!

We are all in need of redemption at some point in our lives. We mess up, we make mistakes. We do things we are ashamed of. That’s the nature of being human. And for that very reason, because we are human, we should be grateful there is such a thing as redemption.

Now maybe, the term redemption is hard for you to hear. Maybe redemption is not a word that you can use comfortably. Maybe, for any number of you, the word redemption only belongs in the Bible. Well, so be it. I won’t push the term on you. But I would ask that you get out your thesaurus, find a different word, a word that has the same or similar meaning, because the concept is too important to leave in the Bible.

Guessing that some of you might want me to use a different term, I’ve done some research. I looked for a synonym. At fist pass, I wanted to trade the term redemption for the word forgiveness. We all have need in our lives for forgiveness, because we’ve stepped on someone’s toes, said something we’re sorry for, we messed up, because we’re human. But if we investigate the term redemption, it has a particular quality that simply is absent in the idea of

forgiveness. When you look into it, forgiveness is a weak substitute. Forgiveness is not synonymous with redemption.

Redemption carries the important idea of a price to be paid. It requires you to give in order to get. Redemption doesn't come for free in the Bible. There is a cost, a payment made. The debt of sin or wrong doing, is not simply cancelled. According to the Biblical story, Christ pays the debt of sin for us all.... One might say, the ultimate price, his life.

In our non-Biblical lives, we can sometimes be forgiven because we ask nicely. We can be forgiven because someone feels sorry for us, or because they think we are cute. In our non-Biblical lives, there is not necessarily a price to be paid for forgiveness. But not so in the Bible. In the Bible, transformation is made possible by redemption.

To go from a fisherman to an apostle, calls for a transformation. To go from an apostle to a denier, another transformation. And to go from a denier to a Saint and Pope, that requires some big time transformation to happen.

To go beyond mere forgiveness to a state of redemption, a transformation of some sort has to happen. Such a transformation in our non-biblical lives is possible, but only with new learning, with increased awareness. A transformation of that sort in our lives comes on the heels of an Aha moment, an experience, of movement, progress, living life at a higher level than just getting by. Transformation comes in the form of gained awareness, increased wisdom, seeing and experiencing the world differently.

The price we pay for transformation is new learning, a new way of seeing. The price we pay requires a deeper sense of what is true, a clearer sense of what is real, living life with an increased sense of honesty, an increased awareness, living life in a fuller way, a more meaningful way. Now that doesn't happen through mere forgiveness.

Redemption requires some sort of effort, action of some sort, it requires work on our part. It doesn't come for free. It is not a gift from the universe or a friend. It always comes after, it always follows some effort or intentionality on our part.

My wish for you during this Easter season and through the years that come, is that you experience a redemption of some sort in your life. My wish for you is that you are able to do the ground work, lay the foundation for a life enhancing transformation. My wish is for you to be given a chance to know more, to see deeper, to touch a truth that better reveals what is foundational in our lives. Maybe you'll have an opportunity to experience the connectedness of our existence. Maybe you'll be blessed enough to see or experience the healing power of love. Or maybe, you'll get a glimmer of the difference you can make in this world of ours. Perhaps you will gain a better appreciation of the source of your own power.

May you be blessed, may you be rewarded for diligence, for work well done. May you come to know a new and improved, a more meaningful way of being in the world. May you come to know a new and improved image of who you are and can be? May you know the joy of rebirth. May this Easter spirit grab you and hold you and feed you. May it be and may God Bless us all.

Amen