

## NEW SERIES: EASTER MIRACLES IN PROCESS

### PART 1: PETER - AN EASTER MIRACLE IN PROCESS

John 18:4-12; 13:31-38

The disciples gathered with Jesus to celebrate the Passover Seder meal as if that particular evening was like all others preceding it. It wasn't, but they could not possibly know or understand the extent of change about to be thrust upon them.

The disciples would face distinct new realities in the coming hours, most notably Judas, Peter and Thomas. One would become complicit in handing Jesus over to the authorities for his arrest and subsequent crucifixion. Another disciple would forcefully deny Jesus not once, but three times, despite having pledged his loyalty to the death. A third disciple would go down in history as the personification of doubt, erasing years of progressive faith, strength and courage. And the other nine? Most would simply slip into the shadows of safety, putting their allegiance to Jesus on hold while they tried to understand all the what's and why's of what we now call Easter weekend.

C.S. Lewis has this take on that world-changing Seder meal: *I don't know and can't imagine what the disciples understood our Lord to mean when, his body still unbroken and his blood still unshed, He handed them the bread and the wine. His command, however, was to take eat, take drink; not take, understand.*

For the remaining eleven disciples it would be after Jesus' ascension and post-Pentecost before they would be able to put the pieces of this cosmic and eternal puzzle together. Understanding major life events takes time and at best it's only partially possible. Understanding is a process, and so is salvation. We must work "at" both to make progress (please note: we work "at" salvation, not for salvation), and this is often a long and laborious process. It certainly wasn't over in a weekend for the disciples. Despite Jesus telling them that he would die and rise from the grave as the triumphant Messiah in plain and veiled ways, they saw their **Jesus-lives** die with him. Life had done a 180, turned-on-a-dime, spun-off-its-axis. Too much change too fast. Cognitive dissonance. Soul dissonance.

Take Peter. He and his brother Andrew were the first two people to accept the call to follow Jesus. Out of the blue, sight unseen, Jesus approaches them and says: *"Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men"* (Matthew 4:18-20). Neither Peter nor Andrew ask what a fisher of men is, which doesn't mean they

knew or understood what was happening. How could they? They were undoubtedly moved by the presence of Jesus and felt the need to drop their fishing gear and follow him. This blind allegiance would see Peter, along with James and John, become the inner circle of disciples that Jesus relied upon throughout his ministry. Peter's bravest moment came in the garden where Jesus was arrested:

*Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth", they said. Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go." This has happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the father has given me?" Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus (John 18:4-12).*

Let us give Peter his full due here. The full array of Roman soldiers sent to apprehend Jesus numbered 600. Add into the equation a number of Jewish soldiers and the valiance of Peter is enormous. One lone fisherman drew a sword in the face of more than 600 of the world's deadliest soldiers. That's courage. That's loyalty. That's right up there with, *"There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends"* (John 15:13). Peter no doubt loved Jesus... so how did he go from being willing to die for Him to denying Him three times in a matter of hours? We pick up the narrative in John 13 after Judas had left the group to finalize the betrayal of Jesus to the authorities:

*When he had left, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is seen for who he is, and God seen for who he is in him. The moment God is seen in him, God's glory will be on display. In glorifying him, he himself is glorified-glory all around! Children, I am with you for only a short time longer. You are going to look high and low for me. But just as I told the Jews, I'm telling you: 'Where I go, you are not able to come.' Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples-when they see the love you have for each other." Simon Peter asked, "Master, just where are you going?" Jesus answered, "You cannot now follow me where I'm going. You will follow later." "Master," said Peter, "why can't I follow now? I'll lay down my life for you!" "Really? You'll lay down your life for me? The truth is that before the rooster crows, you'll deny me three times" (John 13:31-38).*

John 18 tells the story of Peter's denials of Jesus. Peter and another disciple went into the Chief Priest's courtyard. It was there the door keeper said to Peter, "Aren't you one of the man's disciples?" Peter replied, "No I am not." Later, still in the courtyard and near a fire several people were using to stay warm Peter was asked, "Aren't you one of his disciples?" He denied it again, "Not me." Soon after one of the Chief Priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off asked, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" Again, Peter denied it. Just then a rooster crowed.

How did Peter go from facing down 600+ trained killers to protect Jesus to denying he even knew him in the span of two hours? Sudden onset amnesia?

Theologians and Biblical commentators have written volumes on this question and their reasons run the gamut. Not to slight their work but the answer may not be as theological as it is primal. Peter's entire existence was falling apart:

He left his profession and family to follow Jesus

He bought in completely

And with his impulsive nature he seemed to be certain how it was all supposed to turn out in the end

But when it went in the opposite direction; a totally different direction that he had seen coming, a direction he did not, even could not comprehend or understand, and it all happened so fast...

He retreated inwardly.

Which we do when abject fear shock, stress, hyper-anxiety and a lack of understanding take us there.

Or

And this is a big **OR**

When we **allow** fear – shock – stress – anxiety – and a lack of understanding to rock us.

Peter would later realize that each of these primal-life-realities are enemies of faith.

When we can't understand what's happening to us and to our world, we either retreat inwardly or give in, or we step forward **toward** faith (and God).

One is a **short** step.

One is a **leap**.

Peter's first few steps were short, and they ended badly.

In time he would recover, recommit and rebound with a life defined by steps/leaps of faith.

Peter was indeed an Easter miracle in process.

I'd like to think of myself as an unfinished product as well.

My goal in this uneven time when clarity and understanding are elusive:

*Live into the Communion experience: Jesus bids us to take eat and to take drink, not take **understand**.*

I'm going to leave the hard stuff up to Him!

(Feel free to share this with someone. I have a feeling this one touches us all)

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