

Peter and Us as Binders and Loosers

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Lord, may what we loose on earth be loosed in heaven and what we bind on earth be bound in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

Most if not all of the Bible stories about Simon Peter, are meant to get people to like him as one of us, like you and me, a typical human being.

Peter is not the only apostle whom the Gospels present to identify with us. For lofty theology we have Philip, who spoke of higher things, “Show us the Father and we will be satisfied.”

There is also Thomas, who challenged Jesus when he got ridiculously confusing. Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you?³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.⁴ And you know the way to the place were I am going.” Thank God we have Thomas to say for us, “Lord, we don’t have any idea what the heck you are talking about,” Well, John the Evangelist presented it politely, “We don’t know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

And of course, it was Thomas who expressed doubts that any of us reasonably would have that Jesus rose from the dead. “Unless I see and touch the evidence, I will not believe.” Show me the proof. Thomas stands in as one who questions but ultimately is

faithful, as we would be. Peter often represents us in a similar way.

Peter is so good at representing us because he was the Brother of Andrew, he had a mother in law, he was married. These things made him like normal people. It is no surprise that he resisted Jesus saying things that were overwhelming...

Remember when he began to rebuke Jesus who had been talking about his death, Peter reacted, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” That’s a topic most of us would want to avoid, though we might not like Jesus’s response, “Get thee behind me Satan.”

The stories just keep coming. We quickly see that Peter stands in for us as one whose senses are overwhelmed as happened at the Transfiguration, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will set up three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Tents made no sense. I imagine we often would fare no better because the sheer glory of Jesus would overwhelm us, too.

After discussing how hard it will be for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven, Peter said in reply to Jesus, “Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” What will be our reward. Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things...you who have followed me will sit on twelve thrones... And everyone who has left *houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields*, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life.” Peter wanted to know in the end what will

we have to show for sacrificing so much. Jesus says sure you could opt for the power of thrones, but you'll end up having to give up everything because, "The first will be last and the last will be first." Jesus turns it *all* upside down.

We might not like the answer Jesus gave, but we appreciate Peter asking what we'll get out of it. I say this even though things will be tipped upside down and Peter will have nothing in the end. We will have nothing.

As things began to fall apart, Peter asserts his loyalty—"Even if all fall away because of [Jesus], I will never fall away." Later that very night, Peter is seen as, "One of *them*," a follower of Jesus. But Peter denied it, once, twice, then a third time, "I do not know the man!" he swore....*swore vehemently*... and even cursed. Then the cock crowed....

Time and time again, it is so obvious that Peter is presented to represent us all. I apologize to those who are not familiar with the many Bible stories that I mentioned. Clearly I am trying to prove something based on the weight of this evidence. I hope you will viscerally agree with me. It's all based on Peter's relationship with Jesus. Peter stands as one of us.

We even feel for Peter when Jesus nudges the disciples to be bold, "Come on! But who do you say I am?" It dawns on us even as it dawns on Peter, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Scripture works. The Father works in us as the Father worked in Peter, to reveal this truth.

But this question remains: Are the next words of Jesus to to Peter, any different? Is Jesus speaking to Peter as the only one who is given the keys to the kingdom, with the power to define sin or is it given to us all? Does Peter as recipient represent us, as he does throughout the Gospels.

I say the weight of scripture bends the answer to us all. Consider how we have decided in my lifetime, it is a sin to abuse any “vulnerable person”, to deny a person the vote because of their skin color, to deny blacks and women their due honors memorializing their stories of heroism. These things like rape or stealing benefits meant for the poor, may have always been wrong, but they surely are wrong now.

We have also decided in my lifetime, that it is not a sin to be gay, or trans. It is a grave sin to treat LGBTQ people so poorly, rejecting them and isolating them so completely they feel so alone and hopeless that they sometimes kill themselves.

We now realize it is not a sin to pick up life after a divorce. This is especially true if there has been any kind of abuse or animosity that threatens the baptism. In the best of situations the threat of animosity is real, so you always save the baptism. As sacred as marriage is, it is nothing compared to the baptism—even without the baptism, you save the human dignity. I shudder to think there are branches of the church that crush people’s souls by denying them the opportunity to rebuild after a divorce. I knew a pastor who would not go to his son’s wedding because he was marrying a divorced woman. What was he protecting? His own vain and vile purity.

Any of us may lag behind the arc of history. We all sin because change happens more quickly than we can keep up. But a keep-it-the same approach doesn't save anyone's dignity or hold anyone responsible for anything new. We need to try to keep up. We hold the keys not to keep heaven locked away, but to open it. The keys were given to Peter and through Peter to us. They belong to us as they belonged to Peter, a human like us, among the last, and among the least.

Gospel: Matthew 16:13-20

¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." ²⁰Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.