

West Valley Church
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Michael W. O'Neill

On This Rock: Part Seven: Pentecost Transformation

I'm sure by now that you are familiar with this thing (*hold up a thermometer*): some of you have to face this every time you go into work. If you have children, you knew what this was long before this pandemic. There are different kinds of these – some are small glass ones; some you can use just to swipe on or point at someone's forehead. Some tell you the temperature outside. This is a thermometer – we used it with our boys when they were little; you just put this in their ear and it would read their temperature. But whatever kind we are talking about, it is used simply to read the temperature in the atmosphere around you.

This thing, on the other hand, is a thermostat (*hold up a thermostat control*). When this is hooked to a power source and a furnace, this is much different than a thermometer. It has a thermometer in it, so it can read the temperature in a room, but only in order to help it do its job – which is to change, set, and keep the temperature in the room at a desired level. One (*thermometer*) passively reacts to what is going on around it, conforming to what is already in the room. The other (*thermostat*) reads the room in order to change the very nature of the room.

Because of what happened on the Day of Pentecost, if you are a Christian, you could say that you are no longer an ordinary *thermometer*; you are a *thermostat*. *You are a change agent in this world.*

A great example of this kind of transformational change in someone's life is Peter – the guy whose letter we've been spending time looking at in this series called, "On This Rock; Peter and the Church." Today we are going to consider our own lives in light of Peter's life and the transformation that happened to him.

When we first encounter Peter in the Gospel of Matthew, he is referred to as "Simon called Peter," because his name was Simon, until later when Jesus renamed him, or nicknamed him, "Peter," which we've talked about before.

In Matthew's introduction, Simon and his brother Andrew are approached by Jesus while they were carrying out their trade; they were fishermen. So that's the first time we meet Peter; his name is still Simon, and he is...

1. Peter the Fisherman

That was his trade. In New Testament times, unlike today, fishing is never referred to as a recreational activity; it is always a way to make a living. The strenuous life of fishermen required them to be physically strong (Luke 5:2), and their speech was sometimes rough (Mark 14:70f). It was a common trade around the Sea of Galilee, which is still commercially fished to this day. Here's how Matthew introduces us to Peter:

“As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.” (Matthew 4:18, niv)

Like I said, Simon was his name before Jesus changed it. Simon was a very common Greek and Jewish name and not really a complimentary name. There was nothing very outstanding or redeeming about the name or the man. As a person, we know from his later experiences that he was brash and a hothead, probably prone to arguments and fights.

All of that to say – Peter was a thermometer, always reacting to the temperature around him, never accomplishing anything of significance.

But one author writes, “Fishing figures importantly into Peter’s relationship with Jesus. Jesus met Peter where he was at – literally and figuratively. Peter’s first encounter with Jesus was on his fishing boat. When Peter was first called, Jesus said to him, “Follow me and I will (send you out to fish for people).” A similar account of Jesus asking the disciples to throw their nets on the opposite side of the boat also happened near the beginning of Jesus’s relationship with the disciples. It’s recorded in Luke 5:4-6.”¹

But Simon met Jesus, and Jesus invited Simon to become...

2. Peter the Follower

We can see this in the very next verses after what we just read in Matthew’s Gospel – in chapter 4 verse 18-20 –

“As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.” (Matthew 4:18-20, niv)

“As a fisherman, Peter worked with his brother Andrew and in partnership with the sons of Zebedee, James and John. Peter’s fishing operation was probably pretty lucrative. (Several years ago when we visited the Holy Land, we saw the remains of the house believed to be Peter’s family’s house in Capernaum. (It’s larger than many of the houses that have been excavated in that area.

¹ Named: The Disciples (Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, 2013), p 10

Fishermen in Peter's time were also more educated than we tend to give them credit for. They were probably fluent in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic, and proficient in mathematics."²

I tell you that because I don't want you to think that Peter was so poor that he didn't have anything to lose by following Jesus, or that he was so ignorant that he didn't know better than to walk away from his business. Peter knew full well what he was giving up and what it meant for him to follow Jesus.

Peter and the others turned immediately from their own business—fishing for money—to the business of the Kingdom, being fishers of men.

Jesus' first words to them, "Come, follow me," characterize the call to discipleship (4:19). Then Jesus' next words, "I will send you out to fish for people," immediately turn their attention from the demand Jesus makes on them to the results that God desires in the lives of others. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus introduces the task of mission at the same time He creates the fellowship of the church. There can be no mistaking the centrality of mission for Jesus (or His followers).³ Peter had to have understood that. But despite Peter's decision to walk away from his business and follow Jesus, you'll see as you read through all of the Gospel accounts that Peter struggled to understand what it meant to truly follow Jesus and walk in the values of the Kingdom of God. He made great strides and great stumbles.

"Peter was known for his impulsiveness. He asked questions of Jesus that sometimes seem rash and not entirely thought out...he rebukes Jesus for trying to wash his feet, then commands him to wash his whole body; he begs Jesus to help him walk on water (and then sinks), he blurts out requests for Jesus to explain his parables, he swears he will never deny Jesus and then, in fear, does just that. Even though he was now a follower of Jesus, he was still just a thermometer, reacting to what was happening around him.

Unfortunately that meant that Peter the fisherman-become-follower soon became...

3. Peter, the Forsaker

For all his highs and lows, Peter reached the lowest low when he first vowed to never deny Jesus (Matthew 26:31-35), and then on the same night, did exactly that three times – just as Jesus predicted would happen before the rooster crowed.

After twice denying Jesus (Matthew 26:69-72), here's what Matthew writes about the third time Peter had forsaken, or denied Christ:

² *ibid*

³ Roger L. Hahn, [*Matthew: A Commentary for Bible Students*](#) (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 77-78.

“After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.” Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!” Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.” (Matthew 26:73-75, niv)

So despite his bold claims, he turned his back on Jesus and had forsaken him. “If he’d stopped to think even for a few seconds, ...he wouldn’t have denied knowing Christ. But he didn’t think. Three times, he didn’t think. (After that event) he was scared. He was confused. Maybe even angry. But his words were eating him alive.”⁴

His Christian life was a story of struggle, of success and failure. Just when you think he’s got it figured out; he does something to show he’s got it all wrong. Fortunately for Peter, after Jesus rose from the dead he caught up with Peter. He and his brother and friends were back on the boat fishing – not knowing what else to do. I’m sure Peter was thrilled that Jesus had been seen alive, but in the same thought his denials echoed in his soul. And Jesus met them – back at the place he’d first called them, and he asked Peter three times if he loved Jesus – one time for every sin and failure of forsaking Jesus. Once again, Jesus met him where he was.

Within days of that event, we get a new picture of Peter...

4. Peter the Transformed

That’s the story you heard Pastor April read from the Book of Acts. This time, things are different for Peter. While Jesus was still with them after he had risen from the dead, he reminded them about the promise of the Holy Spirit and, like when first he called them, he gave both the promise and the mission. This is what Jesus told them:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8, nlt)

So the disciples all gathered together in a large room for a week and a half, praying together, surrendering themselves to God, seeking the Holy Spirit. And then – the power of the Holy Spirit moved on them. The word that Jesus used to describe the Spirit’s power is where we get our word “dynamite” from. The Spirit’s presence in a person’s life changes the very structure of everything – it blows it all up! Peter was transformed into an entirely different man. Now, instead of great strides and equally great stumbles, Peter was a man of powerful influence for Jesus; his victories were incredibly high and his failures were far fewer and not so low. He still had a few, but they were nowhere near when he had forsaken Jesus. Peter the fisherman-turned-follower-and-then-forsaker became Peter the

⁴ *Named: The Disciples* ibid 11

transformed and the transformer; God radically changed his heart and used him to radically change the world. Things got hot when the fire of the Spirit fell on them. Peter became a Holy Spirit filled thermostat – connected to power and a furnace – reading the temperature and then radically changing it for Christ.

Here's the point of all this: you, my friend, are likely somewhere on that spectrum. Maybe you are listening to this today and you realize that you are like Peter the fisherman. Maybe you are making a pretty decent living, your life is pretty comfortable. Whatever it is you are doing, God wants you to do something bigger. It's time you started following Jesus; he's meeting you where you are. Answer his call to you right now and become a part of his Kingdom mission.

Or maybe today you are a follower, but your stumbles feel just as big as your strides. With your mouth you praise him, but you also put your foot in it. A Christian who is still a thermometer doesn't change anything. You need the Holy Spirit. Maybe worse; you are feeling helpless and lost because you feel you've forsaken Jesus. The problem with being only a follower is that, when things get tough and stressed or you face difficulties for your faith, that's when you're more likely to forsake Jesus and choose your own skin. Maybe you know that you didn't speak up for Jesus when you should have. You aren't loving that particular person in your life like you know you need to. You say you aren't racist, but you give no preference for people of color. When you do not love others, you deny Jesus whose image they are made in. Maybe as a follower you can't get past whoever hurt you or betrayed you or abused you or took advantage of you. You are still living in a temperature from an event that happened years ago. Jesus meets you again right where you are. Oh my dear friends: you will receive dynamic power in the Holy Spirit; your follower-life can be transformed into a powerful presence for Christ in this world. You will be connected to power and a furnace; you will be a thermostat for Christ.

I'm going to pause for a moment in prayer. I'm going to consider my own heart and I urge you to do the same. Then I'm going to pray for us, then I want to close with a challenge.

Pray

Would you commit to something? Would you commit to praying for West Valley Church? Pray for the separate presence of the Holy Spirit to rest on each of us everywhere we are scattered right now, that we would not only be a transformative presence of Christ in our homes and neighborhoods, but that when we can be back together in worship, we will see from our community a day of Pentecost response to the Gospel? Please: seek the Spirit earnestly and pray for West Valley Church.

Grace and Peace, my dear friends.