

**SAINT PETER APOSTLE 2014**  
**SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**ACTS 12.1 ST. MATTHEW 16.13**

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Jesus called him Peter...*Cephas...rock* in Hebrew. Just who was this man called Peter?

We first meet Peter in Holy Scripture when Jesus calls him and his brother Andrew along with another set of brothers, James and John...the "Sons of Thunder"...to leave their successful fishing business and follow him. Jesus promised they would go catch people instead of fish.

Peter seems like an odd choice for someone who would later become an important leader in the Church. He was born in Bethsaida in Galilee as Simon bar-Jonas...Simon the Son of John...or as we would call him today...Simon Johnson. He was from the wrong side of town...he didn't go to the university...he talked with a funny country accent. He was by all accounts illiterate. In fact...he was the perfect choice!

Simon was a naturally born leader but he could sometimes be impulsive and bullheaded, saying things without thinking things through. When he acted on those impulses and let his bullheadedness get the better of him, he sometimes got himself into trouble. It's not hard to imagine Peter and the "Sons of Thunder" letting off some steam at the Bethsaida Pub and Grill after a hard week of fishing.

What did Jesus see in Peter...the man who sometimes acted like his head was a rock? He saw in him a man whose impulsive and bullheaded behavior could be tempered and put to good use. But first Peter would have to endure some character-building trials and tribulations of his own that would prepare him to carry out the mission Jesus had in mind for him...a mission that would ultimately lead him to Rome and martyrdom during Nero's persecution of the Church.

The Gospel reading takes place in the final days of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus asks his disciples what people think about him. They give different answers...some say John the Baptist...some say Elijah...others say one of the other prophets. Then Jesus asks the disciples what do THEY think about him. It is Simon Peter who answers the question with a profound confession of faith...calling him the "Messiah, the Son of the living God."

This is a watershed moment in Simon Peter's life. Jesus congratulates Peter for giving the right answer and tells him he didn't come up with the answer on his own, but it was revealed to him directly by God the Father in heaven. It is at this point that Jesus first names Simon...***Cephas...Peter...a rock...and a rock foundation on which he will build his church...and even death will not overcome it.***

Peter, James and John, had a special relationship with Jesus. They were his closest friends and they alone were present with him at the Transfiguration and in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he died. In spite of this special friendship, Peter was anything but rock-solid when Jesus was arrested. Three times he denied even knowing Jesus and when the rooster crowed, Jesus turned and looked at Peter, who broke down and cried when he remembered Jesus told him he would act this way.

Pentecost marked the moment in Peter's life when he stopped being the coward who ran away when things got tough. He preached the Good News about Jesus to thousands of people in what would become his most famous sermon. The Holy Spirit empowered him to be brave and helped him understand his mission...but he could still be impulsive and bullheaded...he could be rocky.

Peter held a position of leadership in the Church. His name appears first in the list of the Apostles in the Gospels and Acts. He presided over the synod that elected Matthias to replace Judas. He was at first eager to welcome Gentiles into the Church, but when he caved into pressure from Jewish Christians, Saint Paul sharply criticized his backsliding. Peter later had to make a very public apology for making such a fool out of himself.

What makes Peter so believable is that he was a very real human being just like us, a man whose faith in Jesus sustained him. He could get things right...sometimes. But he also made mistakes, just as we all do. Jesus didn't choose Peter because he was perfect...none of us are. He chose him because he was the right person for the right job at the right time...and he knew Peter wouldn't let him down.

Jesus asked Peter what he thought about him? He asks us the same question. Peter gave the right answer and so must we...He is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

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