

## "...and Peter."

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**Bible Text:** Mark 16:7  
**Preached on:** Sunday, May 9, 2021

### **Ebenezer Free Reformed Church**

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Our scripture reading for this morning comes to us from the gospel of Mark, Mark 16, reading the whole chapter. Let us give attention of our hearts to the word of God.

1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him [that is, Jesus' body]. 2 And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. 3 And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? 4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. 5 And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. 6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. 7 But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. 8 And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid. 9 Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. 10 And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. 11 And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. 12 After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. 13 And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them. 14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. 15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. 17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; 18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick,

and they shall recover. 19 So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. 20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

Our text portion is from verse 7,

7 But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

With emphasis on the two words "and Peter."

Congregation, let me just read the text again, "But go your way," the angel said to the women, "tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." I want to focus as I mentioned on the words "and Peter."

Congregation, the text is, in that narrow focus, a very short one, just two words, and yet these two words contain a very rich gospel message. It is noteworthy that these two words are only found in the gospel record of Mark. Mark, himself, was not a disciple, not one of the 12, in fact, his name is not mentioned in the scriptures until Acts 12:12, and you would recall the context there that Peter had been imprisoned and then an angel came and released him from the prison, Herod wanted to execute him the next day or very soon, and the Lord delivered him through an angel and he was allowed to go out, the chains fell off his hands and his feet and the doors of the prison opened, and when he was in the street he realized the Lord had delivered him. And so he went to the home of Mary in Jerusalem and there reported what the Lord had done before he left the city, and we notice in Acts 12:12 that it was the house of Mary who was the mother of John whose surname was Mark, that is, John Mark. It's the Mark who later wrote this gospel record.

Now it may be, on the one hand, that Mary was one of the women at the graveside, it seemed that she would be, her home being in Jerusalem, and that she heard the words of the angel herself and that she would be able to tell her son, Mark, that's what the angel said, "and Peter." There's also, however, a strong tradition that tells us that Mark received much of his information regarding the gospel record from Peter himself and therefore we could well imagine that as Mark is writing the gospel record, if Peter was there and looking over his shoulders, that he might say in Mark, "Be sure that you add those two words because the angel said go tell his disciples and Peter." Nevertheless, the main thing for us is that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the gospel record records these two words and they are significant for us.

The context of this particular announcement we all are acquainted with several weeks ago, we meditated on the gospel theme of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus out of the grave, and the women coming to the grave wondering who would roll the stone away, the stone is already rolled away, they see this angel or maybe a couple of angels, and they then receive this announcement from the angel. And we notice that the angel announces that the Lord is risen, and as we compare the gospel records, we know that the angel said,

"Fear not ye for I know ye seek Jesus." The angel could understand that the soldiers who were guarding the grave, they would run away with fear, unbelievers would well fear and should well fear that Jesus is risen from the grave. "He will come again to judge the living and the dead. But you who seek Jesus," the angel is saying, "you need not fear, in fact, the opposite for you, there is a gospel message in store for you. Jesus is risen from the grave. He is victorious over hell and death and the grave and Satan. This is good news. Go, then, and share this news with the disciples. Go tell his disciples and as you go, don't forget to also tell Peter."

"...and Peter." Let's meditate on the resurrection gospel for Peter. The resurrection gospel for Peter. "...and Peter." Now why did the angel make special mention of Peter? That's the question that we need to focus on. Had the angel not said, "tell his disciples," and if we go through the gospel records we know that wherever the disciples are listed, Peter surely is among them, if not prominent in the listing. Why, then, would there only be a particular mention of Peter? There's not a listing "and John, and James, and Andrew, and Thomas," etc. but only this phrase, "and Peter." Why would they have to mention Peter separately? I mean, anyone who knows the disciples would know about Peter. I mean, how could you have met the disciples and not been aware of Peter being among them? He was so spontaneous in his character. He would be the first to act when something needed to be done. He would be the first to speak if there was a question asked. And so, well, we would never have, and surely the women would never have forgotten about Peter.

Why, then, would there be special mention of Peter? Is it because Peter had manifested himself as such a specially sanctified disciple, that he had grown in holiness, that he would merit special mention, that he would, in fact, be the one who because of his high level of holiness at this particular time, that he would be the chief disciple, the prince of apostles, that he would be soon named the pope, the first pope of the universal church? There are some who would explain this special mention in that way but, no, that's not the reason. It is not because of something glorious or meritorious that Peter's name is first mentioned in special mention here. No. In fact, it is because of something quite shameful that it happened to him. Jesus, as we know, had warned him in Luke 11 and in particular in the verses in Luke 22 rather in the verses 31 through 34 that Jesus had there warned Peter, he had given him heads up as to what was going to happen. He had said to Peter, "Simon, Satan has desired to have you. He has asked for you," it literally says, "and to sift you as wheat." He said that with language that we notice from the King James that distinguishes the plural and the singular. He is saying about all of them, "Satan has desired to have you all and sift you," and because they were all going to be running away the night in which he was arrested. Then it says as if Jesus is turning especially to Peter, "Yes, Peter, you too. You too are going to stumble, be offended because of me this night. But I have prayed for you. Satan has desired to have you all but I have prayed for thee," singular, "that thy faith fail not." Special mention of prayer for Peter for a special reason because we know that that night, in fact, even though Peter had protested, "Even if all should be offended, not I," etc., yet when he was asked if he was one of the disciples, he denied the Lord three times. And then he saw Jesus' face and the rooster crowed and he remembered what Jesus had said and he went out and wept bitterly.

Can you imagine how he felt? Wouldn't some of the words of Asaph's Psalm fit, "Has God forgotten to be kind? Has he cast me off forever now?" He went and wept bitterly. Have you ever felt that way, weeping in the bitterness of your sin, weeping about the failures of your life, in the darkness of night feeling hopeless? Have you ever felt that way, like a Peter? Well, then let me urge you to listen because there are some wonderful lessons here. This is a message of joy, the message of resurrection gospel for disciples like Peter.

First of all, let me point out this lesson, that what we have here is a message of resurrection hope for the doubting heart of an awakened sinner and a grieving backslider. A message of hope for an awakened sinner and a grieving backslider. People in such circumstances might have their hearts filled with all kinds of doubt, "Could I even be accepted by the Lord? Would I even still belong? Don't I deserve to be cast off forever? How different am I than Judas who betrayed him?" But who would think that? Who would think that Peter was not included? The expression "and Peter" does imply that there might be some thoughts that Peter isn't included and therefore that Peter needs to have this reassurance that there might be some implication that Peter might feel excluded and so that he would need this special mention.

Well, who would have thought that Peter would not be included among the disciples? Well, first of all, then we could mention Peter himself. Surely that thought would have come up in his own mind as he's out there weeping bitterly. Maybe he, like Thomas, had sort of held himself back for some time, that he thought he didn't really belong anymore. "I have denied the Lord three times and how can I be included?" Well, maybe even the disciples, the rest of the disciples were scratching their heads and wondering, "Well, we know Judas is not included anymore, what about Peter though?" Very likely John, who was not too far away, would have known about Peter denying his Savior. "Is Peter still one of us? Should we not maybe scratch his name off the membership list?" Maybe there are some of the members of the congregation who feel that their name really shouldn't belong on the membership list. Maybe there are some other members, maybe there are some thoughts in the consistory at this time, "Well, what about this person? Shouldn't we just scratch their name off the list?"

Who else might have thought that Peter didn't belong anymore? Well, you can be sure that Satan was active with those thoughts as well. Satan is the accuser of the brethren. He is the one who will point at the dirty garments of the Lord's servants as he did in the prophecy of Zechariah, that he pointed to the filthy garments of Joshua the high priest. There are all kinds of reasons for embarrassment that the devil would be quite sure to remind us of. "Peter," he might have said, "do you think you still belong?" Jesus said, "The devil has desired to have you and to sift you as wheat." And do you think that the devil stopped when he had succeeded in tripping Peter into sin? No, he would keep going. You know, when the devil has succeeded in tripping us into sin, when he has succeeded in getting us down, he will do his best to keep us down, to keep us in doubt and to keep us in despair. And he might have whispered things like, "Well, Peter, I guess that's it for you. You might as well exclude yourself. Are you still a believer? You think you still would be accepted? Come now, stop being a hypocrite. You might as well just

leave the circle of the disciples, leave the fellowship of the circle of Christians. Break off your ties. It's hopeless."

Congregation, these words of Jesus sent via the angel, "and Peter," contain a message of hope, a message of hope for the awakened sinner and the grieving backslider. When the devil attacks our conscience and the thing is that there is added to all of these other thoughts, there is the fact that our own conscience might agree with the devil's whispering that we don't belong, remember these words, "and Peter." Jesus still offers hope to an awakened sinner and a grieving backslider. But secondly, we see here this is not only a message of hope but it is a message of forgiveness. This is a message of the assurance of forgiveness for those who sorrow about their sin, those who, like Peter, have gone out and wept bitterly because of their sin. Peter's sin was indeed a frightening thing. I mean, after all, think of the times that Peter had opened his mouth and professed such glorious things about Jesus. "Who do men say that I am?" And Peter answers, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Another time Jesus had asked, "Will you also go away?" And Peter pipes up, "Lord, to whom shall we go, thou hast the words of eternal life. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And that night in which the Lord had his supper with his disciples and maybe that type of thing can happen to us too, that we are so inspired by being able to be at the Communion Table and so enthused about that experience that we would maybe profess, like Peter, "Lord, though all should be offended because of thee, not I." And we are full of zeal and desire to serve the Lord. But that very night, Peter stumbled. He had undone all those glorious professions. While he had been the mouthpiece of what was revealed not by flesh but by the heavenly Father he had expressed on the one hand, now in his denial he had been the instrument of the father of lies and denied his Savior. What bitterness filled his heart but Jesus says, "And Peter, I forgive you." Because it was also for Peter that Jesus had said on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." He had suffered for Peter. He had prayed for Peter. He had atoned for Peter's sin and paid the full price and said, "It is finished." Jesus paid it all and this message, "and Peter," means, "Peter, this is the offer of assurance regarding the forgiveness of your sins." Oh, what a precious gospel message to those who grieve about their sin.

But thirdly, this is a message of the faithful love of Christ to preserve his own in the midst of the greatest of trials. This is a message about the faithful preserving love of Christ. The Song of Solomon says in 8:7, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." Many waters cannot quench love. Indeed Jesus had suffered the floods of the wrath of God, the waters of suffering had gone over him, and into his soul, in fact, the sufferings of hellish torment, but all of those waters could not quench the love of Jesus for his disciples, including Peter, and that faithful love of Jesus is the source of the preservation of a failing disciple like Peter. No, it is not because Peter said, "Lord, though all, I. I." No, not because of even the sincerity of his intention in such a bold profession but the key and fountain for the preservation of Peter is not in the faithfulness of Peter as a disciple but in the faithfulness of Jesus as his Savior. "Simon, I have prayed for you that your faith fail not." Jesus was saying, "No one will pluck you out of my hand, Peter. I have held onto you."

To human eyes it looked like the devil was having his way. To human eyes it looked like Peter's soul was hanging over the pit of hell suspended by a silk thread. But in reality Peter was being held by the mighty golden cords of the Savior's love. Peter had let go of Jesus for a moment but Jesus had never let go of Peter. Peter was trusting in himself, "Lord, though all would forsake thee, not I. I am willing to go to prison and to death for thee." And he may have been sincere in his desire but he was wrong in his self-confidence. He was trusting in himself and so the Lord had to correct him. "No, you're not going to be preserved because of your own intentions or your trust in yourself or your self-confidence, Peter, you're going to be preserved because of me, because of my suffering, because of my faithful love, because I have prayed for you that your faith fail not."

Peter failed in the exercise of his faith. Peter failed in the continuing exercise of his faith but Jesus did not fail to preserve the essence of his faith. There's a distinction. The essence of faith is the seed of new life in our heart and that is the seed of true love for the Lord as well. But we fail to exercise it as believers so often, and our only hope of being preserved is the faithful love of Christ to preserve the essence of faith in our heart. Our eternal security is resting solely in Christ the Savior. We cannot preserve ourselves and we cannot even persevere by our own faith. It is by means of faith but it is Jesus who keeps that faith alive.

Whatever trials, believer, you're going through in life, this is a comfort, isn't it, that the Lord will preserve his own. He will keep you. He who neither slumbers nor sleeps shall preserve thy soul. He who loves us will never cease to love us. "I give unto them eternal life," he says, "and they shall never perish neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand." That is true for all of the disciples and for Peter. And what pastoral love, what faithful shepherdly love Jesus has for his sheep. He will never leave them nor forsake them. He will be with them. Persevering love.

But this resurrection gospel has been applied to Peter's heart in a personal way, and as we look at these various lessons, then what we also need to realize is that this is what's necessary for us. There is a general announcement of the resurrection gospel. Jesus is risen indeed! He is victorious over the grave, over sin, and Satan, and hell! That's the general application of the gospel, the general proclamation rather of the gospel, but there needs to be also the personal application, and Peter. And that message, that personal message came home to Peter's heart. Has that come home to our heart? Have we had such an experience that under the preaching of the gospel or meditating on the word of God that there is a certain sermon or a paragraph or a sentence or even two words of the message that has come home to our heart in a personal way so that we know the Lord is not only speaking to others but also to me? He has remembered me also in his mercy, his grace.

You see, the offer of forgiveness, the offer of hope, the offer of the assurance of perseverance goes out in the gospel but it is not possible for us to truly confess, "This is my only comfort in life and death, that I am not my own but belong to my faithful Savior

Jesus Christ," until it comes home to our heart with the power of grace through the Spirit. This offers hope. This offers forgiveness. This offers the assurance of perseverance to unworthy sinners and how we need the work of the Holy Spirit to appropriate these things. Are there some here who can identify with Peter? Are there some in the homes or here in the sanctuary who can say, "Yes, the Lord has also spoken to my heart in a personal way"? Have you been able to confess with David when that personal accusation came to him, first of all, "Thou art the man," but then also the offer of forgiveness and the Lord has put away the iniquity of your sin, have you been able to plead before the Lord in a way that you could appropriate that which was offered in the gospel to your own heart by the work of the Spirit and been able to say, "How blessed is he whose trespasses have freely been forgiven, whose sin is wholly covered before the sight of heaven"? Then you too may be comforted by this confirming message, "and Peter."

Just a final point I want to make before I close and that is that these words contain in them also a personal assurance for Peter that he will see the Lord in his resurrection glory. He will see and experience the Lord in his resurrection glory. Notice the text, "go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goes before you into Galilee," there you shall see him, "there ye shall see him, as he said unto you." And who will see him? Well, all the disciples but also Peter. Yes, and that did happen. Is the Lord slack in his promises that he would not fulfill this? No. What do we read when the men on the way to Emmaus come back to that Upper Room and are ready to announce that they have seen Jesus? Well, before they could even say that, the people in the room were saying, "The Lord is risen indeed and has appeared unto Simon, Simon Peter." "He's appeared to him?" Yes, before the first Lord's day was over, Jesus appeared personally to Peter.

I can well imagine that when the angels said this and that message came to Peter, "He will go before you into Galilee," that Peter was at that moment thinking, "Oh, let's just go to Galilee now. Let's go off." No, we have to finish the days of the feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days we have to be here. We have to make sure that we're here for the full eight or nine days and so that would include the next Lord's Day. They had to stay in Jerusalem. They couldn't go off and Peter was probably just wringing his hands with anxiety wanting to go to Galilee but, "Peter, don't be so anxious." That very day Jesus appeared to Peter. You can read that in Luke 24:34, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon."

But there was another instance of that, wasn't there, by the sea of Galilee. There by the sea of Galilee Peter was waiting and so impatient and he said, "I'm going fishing." I'm not a fisherman so I don't identify with that kind of eagerness but that was also how he sustained his family so he was a man who realized that if you had time on your hand, you do your duty too. So they went fishing and they caught nothing and there was someone on the shore who said, "Why don't you throw your net on the right side of the boat?" I know very little about fishing but I do know that that probably does not make too much difference. But they did it, and when the net was full, one of the disciples recognized immediately who it was that told them.

Do you remember at the beginning of Jesus' ministry that Jesus had said to Peter, "Go and launch out and throw in the net"? "But we've been fishing all night and we've caught nothing. But nevertheless at thy word," he said. And then the net was full and here again, "At his word," they knew it was him. It was Jesus and Peter was so eager to go and see Jesus, eager to meet with the Lord. Jesus had gone before him, met him in Galilee, and in that great day of Pentecost, the disciples were all gathered there and Peter filled with the Holy Spirit he could preach, and then later on he could see the Lord in his glory when he was taken up to be with the Lord, he would be included in that great multitude before the throne of God and there in that great multitude there are so many saved sinners before the Lord like Noah and Abraham and Jacob the deceiver, Rahab the harlot, David the adulterer, Manasseh the wicked king, Mary Magdalene out of whom seven demons were cast, Thomas the doubter, and Peter, glorifying God and praising him for his amazing grace to sinners. That grace is known by all believers, is it known also by you? Can you add your name to that list? And one day I will see the Lord in his resurrection glory. What an amazing comfort of amazing grace. Amen.

Let us bow in prayer and thanksgiving.

*We come before thee, O Lord, and we do give thee thanks for the fact that we could this morning sing thy praises and call upon thy name and that we could also meditate on a portion of thy word that speaks to us, a message of hope, of hope for awakened sinners and grieving backsliders, a message of the assurance of forgiveness for those who have sorrowed for their sin, who have wept bitterly with Peter, a message of the assurance of perseverance and of preservation by the love, the faithful love of Christ for those who have repented of their own unfaithfulness. Lord, we come before thee and we pray that thou will grant that we may also know something of seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in all the glory of his person, the power of his work in his resurrection glory. Lord, we pray that thou will grant that we may go forth in this day and all the days of our life with that assurance of forgiveness, desiring to serve thee, to show forth our thankfulness to the Lord for so great a salvation. Grant, O Lord, that the encouragement of amazing grace may go with us as it is contained in these two words, and we pray that thou will be with us this afternoon, refresh us and renew us and grant that we may be able to return to the sanctuary or to the home and pay attention to another message in the life of Peter about the faithfulness of the Lord. We pray be with us for Jesus' sake. We pray in his name only. Amen.*