

“Stepping into Storms”

Second in a series on Peter's First Letter

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)

1st Peter 1.1-9 and Matthew 16.13-28

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Matthew 16.13-25

Jesus came to Caesarea Philippi. There he put this question to his disciples:
'Who do people say that the son of man is?'

'John the Baptist,' they replied. 'Others say Elijah. Others say Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.'

'What about you?' he asked them. 'Who do you say I am?'

Simon Peter answered.

'You're the Messiah,' he said. 'You're the son of the living God!'

'God's blessing on you, Simon, son of John!' answered Jesus. 'Flesh and blood didn't reveal that to you; it was my father in heaven. And I've got something to tell you, too: you are Peter, the rock, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell won't overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you tie up on earth will have been tied up in heaven, and whatever you untie on earth will have been untied in heaven.'

Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

From then on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he would have to go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised on the third day.

Peter took him and began to tell him off. 'That's the last thing God would want, Master!' he said. 'That's never, ever going to happen to you!'

Jesus turned on Peter. 'Get behind me, satan!' he said. 'You're trying to trip me up! You're not looking at things like God does! You're looking at things like a mere mortal!'

continued . . .

Matthew 16.13-25 (continued)

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to come after me, they must give themselves up, and pick up their cross, and follow me. Yes: if someone wants to save their life, they must lose it; and if anyone loses their life for my sake they will find it.'

N. T. Wright's *Kingdom New Testament*

1st Peter 1.1-9

From Peter, someone sent by Jesus the Messiah.

To those who are chosen exiles of the scattering in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been set aside in advance by God the Father, through the making-holy of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus the Messiah and for sprinkling with his blood.

May grace and peace be multiplied on you!

May the God be blessed, the Father of our Lord Jesus the Messiah. His mercy is abundant, so he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah from the dead. Your new birth is into an incorruptible inheritance, which cannot be stained or diminished. It is kept safe for you in the heavens, and you are protected by God's power through God's faithfulness. Your new birth is into a salvation ready to be unveiled in the final time.

So you celebrate! Yes, you must suffer trials and tests for a little while. This is so the true value of your faith can be discovered. Your faith is worth more than gold. Gold can perish, even though it is tested by fire. What will come from this is praise, glory, and honour when Jesus the Messiah is unveiled. Although you've never seen him, you love him. Even though you don't see him now, you have faith in him and so rejoice with a glorious joy that is too much for words. You are receiving the goal of your faith: your salvation.

My translation, using N. T. Wright's *Kingdom New Testament* and various commentaries.

"Although you have not seen him, you love him."

They had not seen Jesus. Peter had.¹

Peter was among the first. He saw Jesus fill his empty nets with a feast of fish. Peter saw Jesus heal people. Peter saw Jesus transfigured with God's glory.

Peter saw Jesus wash *his* feet. Peter saw Jesus restore an enemy's ear, which Peter had slashed off. Peter saw Jesus' pain as Peter denied even knowing him.

Peter saw Jesus command us to live with abundant forgiveness, and saw Jesus forgive him, again and again and again.

Peter did not see Jesus crucified; he had run away. But he saw the tomb, empty. He saw Jesus resurrected and alive.

Peter's actual name was *Shim'on*, Simon. Jesus renamed him, *Kephas*. It means "Rock." In Greek, that's *Peter*.

What sort of rock would this Peter turn out to be?

We heard it in our first Bible reading this morning. Peter saw that Jesus is the Christ, God's King for God's People. But when Jesus turned to talk about himself crucified, Peter could not see. Peter objected. Jesus called him *Satan*, Tempter, the Rock trying to trip Jesus up.

But even stumbling Peter is the Rock on which Jesus built his Church-community. Jesus commissioned this broken Rock, to care for and feed Jesus' people.

As part of his caring and feeding, Peter writes this letter to some who had not seen Jesus. Perhaps he is remembering Jesus' promise to Thomas, and so trusts those who have not seen Jesus can yet believe and be blessed.

¹ Most critical scholars do not believe that Peter the apostle of Jesus wrote this letter. I'm very much a non-expert. Still, I've looked at the arguments against Petrine authorship, and they seem quite unconvincing, resting on unproven assumptions. I think Peter likely employed an *amanuensis*, perhaps Silvanus (5:12), who did the writing based on what Peter dictated to him. This was a common practice, and would easily explain the cultured style of Greek we find in the letter.

II

Even in storms.

You know, life. And all that life crashes into you. In The Princess Bride, the Dread Pirate Roberts said, "*Life is pain. Anyone who says otherwise is selling something.*" Well, I have nothing to sell. I doubt you'd buy anyway. You know better.

One of the wisdoms of these days is that we are all in the same storm which, unbelievable, grows stormier. Same storm. Different boats. We're experiencing this pandemic differently. Factory workers are suffering more than people like me who can work from home. Poorer folk are suffering more than the better off. Indigenous people, people of colour, recent arrivals to Canada . . . there are reasons some neighbourhoods are hot spots, and reasons why leaders are slow to see that. They're calling this financial crisis a "She-session" because it's hitting women particularly hard. Within these important generalizations, of course it all varies from person to person, circumstance to circumstance, different personalities, different measures of luck.

This is one storm. Sure, there is more to life than pain; the Dread Pirate Roberts was pessimistic. Yet every life includes pain. Suffering is inclusive, everyone's unwelcomed guest. No one is exempt. Christians are not exempted. Anyone who says otherwise is selling something.

III

Actually, if you're walking along with Jesus, expect storms.

Peter's letter-recipients, though they have not seen, deeply love Jesus. They trust him and give their allegiance to him.

And they are in storms. The same sorts of things we all can go through. Trusting Jesus has not changed that. Trusting Jesus has added to it. Because of their new commitment, and the things they are now doing or have stopped doing because they belong to Jesus, they are facing increasing hardship. Hostility from friends, neighbours, in their workplaces, within their families. Jesus has not made things easier for them. He's made life harder.

So why bother? Why stick with Jesus?

Peter once saw Jesus in the midst of a storm, a real on-the-sea tempest. Jesus wasn't with them. They were in a boat, experienced sailors but struggling hard. Then they saw Jesus walking toward them, over the water. They were terrified!

But because he knew it was Jesus, Peter begged to walk over to him, on the water.² And Jesus said, "*Come.*"

Following Jesus means stepping into storms.

IV

So when disease, plague, and pandemic have broken out through the ages, instead of fleeing with everyone else, some Christians have stayed to care for those who could not. They suffer alongside them. They've stepped into the storm.

When others have faced prejudice, discrimination, persecution, genocide, Jesus-lovers have stood alongside them, used their voice to speak up for them, sheltered them, hidden them, died alongside them. They've stepped into storms of injustice, because that's where Jesus is.

When others have less, Jesus-believers have given away more — their money, their time, their abilities — generously and joyfully. They've stepped into the storms of need, because that's where Jesus is, and they love to be with him.

When Jesus-delighters, in some places, are ridiculed they return with kindness; when harassed respond with gentleness; endure persecution with perseverance; and sometimes meet their deaths, but with prayers of love on their lips. Jesus is with them, and so they experience a joy beyond words.

Our inkling might be to say that, unlike us, these people are extraordinary. Usually they are not. They are ordinary people.

They are not storm chasers. They have not sought out suffering. That's not what this is about. But when the storms come up around them, and they've seen Jesus in the midst of the storm, they've said, "*Lord, bring me to yourself.*"

Storms vary in size, intensity, duration. A storm Jesus calls you to step into will be different from someone else's. It will be where he wants *you* to be.

² Matthew 14.22-33.

V

Still, why step into the storm?

Because God — with love for you that far exceeds what can be measured, with love for you that is beyond anything you can expect or hope for — God is giving you a new life. God's life for you is resurrection life, because it is with Jesus. His resurrection is becoming your resurrection. That's the hope God is birthing you into.

Peter talks about an inheritance. Some of these people he's writing to had probably been cut off from their families. Their livelihoods are at risk. In the storm you might feel you're losing everything. Yet God's life for you is perfectly safe, and all that matters most will not expire, will not tarnish, will not fade away. It's got God's guarantee.

Peter says the storms last only "a little while." That can be a long time! We know their persecution grew worse, and lasted generations. Even so, in the scope of the eternal life Jesus has given you, the storms are short. Still, terrible. Still, terrifying. Still, short.

So much suffering serves no purpose. These storms I'm talking about, however, you're walking into with Jesus. So your endurance, your sacrifices, your offerings are wrapped within God's work. God's work: life-saving, justice-restoring, wound-healing, peace-bringing, new creation-making. Trust in God's trust-worthiness. Someone put it like this: *"When Jesus wraps this all up, it's your faith, not your gold, that God will have on display as evidence of his victory."*³

VI

It's remarkable, how much Peter had changed.

Remember back to when Jesus started talking about his crucifixion. Peter freaked out. How could the way of the Messiah go through such suffering, such shame, such defeat?

Years later, at the end of this letter, he says that he's writing from "Babylon." That ancient city was pretty much gone by then. So it seems this was a code for another place of exile and oppression, Rome.

Jesus had called him into that stormy place. And there, the Rock was executed, likely crucified. His faith tested. His inheritance safe. His salvation unveiled. And Peter with Jesus, his Rock. Amen.

³ Part of Eugene Peterson's *The Message* translation of verse 17.