

Sermon, March 4, 2012  
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In the readings today we heard a story about Abraham and a story about Peter. Peter and Abraham have some things in common. They are both men of great faith and they both have a great calling from God, and they both receive a new name because of that great calling. A few verses before our Gospel reading today, Jesus says to Peter, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." And in the reading from Genesis we have, "Your name shall be Abraham..."

Though they were men of great faith and great callings, both Peter and Abraham made some pretty big mistakes. They both allowed fear, and the cares and values and things of this world to distract them from their calling.

A few chapters before this reading in Genesis, Abraham had arrived in the land which God promised to him, but because of a famine, he went to Egypt. Now when he got to Egypt he was afraid because Sarah was very beautiful. So he told Sarah to pretend that he was her brother and not her husband. And because of that lie, Pharaoh took Sarah into his house and made her one of his wives. And in return, Pharaoh gave Abraham flocks, and slaves, and wealth. When Pharaoh realized that God was cursing his house because Sarah was the wife of Abraham, Pharaoh gave Sarah back to Abraham, and Abraham left Egypt a very wealthy man.

Peter also made some big mistakes. On the night that Jesus was handed over to be killed, Peter denied that he even knew Jesus three times, even though Jesus had warned him of this. Peter had sworn that he would not deny Jesus even if it meant that he himself was killed. In the reading today Jesus calls Peter "Satan". Peter was focusing on his fear. He was afraid of losing Jesus, and probably afraid of what that would mean to him, the other disciples, and the Jesus movement. Peter believed that Jesus was the messiah, but he also had ideas about what that meant. He was probably thinking about power, and convention, and what the world said that the messiah would be. These seem like little things, but these things infected Peter's heart, and had the potential of infecting the community around Jesus.

Time and again we hear in the Gospel that we cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve God and the world. Jesus does not say, "Pick up your worries, your desire for power, your values of the world, and all your possessions, and follow me." No, Jesus says, "Pick up your cross." Your cross... utter obedience to God, the very definition of humility, the antitheses of the values of the world. We are called to lose ourselves, our worldly fear-based notions. It is in shedding this worldly life, that we can find our true life in Christ.

This is not a decision we make just one time. We can't say, "Great, now I'm a Christian, got that one taken care of." No, it is a moment by moment decision that

we have to make day by day, to lay down the things of the world. We are called to be in the world, not of the world.

What does this mean? Jesus simplifies it for us: we are called to love God, and to love our neighbor. And because of that love, we are called to work to remake the world in the image of what it is that God created it to be: a Kingdom of love and of justice. We have plenty of work to do!

In my preparation for my time representing The Episcopal Church with the Anglican Communion delegation of observers to the UN Commission on the Status of Women (this week and next), I have been shaken up by what I have learned about the injustice facing women in the world.

- 100 million women and girls are missing from the world today merely because of their gender. They were either aborted because they were girls, or they were neglected, not given enough food or medical care because they were girls, killed, or trafficked because they were women or girls. ([Nicholas Kristoff, New York Times](#))
- If women had equal access as men to land, agricultural extension services, and agricultural inputs, the resulting increase in production would result in 150 million fewer hungry people, men, women, boys, and girls, in the world. Gender discrimination alone is keeping 150 million people hungry. ([FAO](#))

We can hear the appalling statistics like these from around the world, and point fingers, but we also need to look at the status of women in our own country.

- In the US, women who are as equally qualified as men, still receive 88¢ on the dollar as their male counterparts working in the same jobs, merely because they are women. ([CNN](#))
- Our congress is below the international average in percentage of female representatives (16%). We rank 94<sup>th</sup> out of 190 nations. Of the countries ranking above us: 24 are from Africa, 6 are from the Middle East, 16 from Asia, 33 from Europe and Eastern Europe, 12 from Central and South America and the Carribean, and both of our neighbors: Canada and Mexico. ([Inter-Parliamentary Union](#))
- There are six nations in the world who have not signed the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This is the treaty on human rights for women, which was brought forward by the UN in 1979. The countries that have not signed on are: Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Palau, and Tonga... and the US. Though it has been supported by our Presidents, it requires a super-majority in the Senate to pass. ([CEDAW 2012](#))
- 1,000 to 1,600 women are killed per year in the US, due to domestic violence. Domestic violence is so prevalent, that US women lose 7.9 million days of work per year because of injury from domestic violence. The lost productivity in our economy, and the cost of health care from domestic

- violence adds up to a staggering national cost of \$8.3 billion per year. ([NIJ Journal](#) and [Corporate Alliance to end Partner Violence](#))
- In October of last year, which happens to be domestic violence awareness month. The city council of Topeka Kansas voted to de-criminalize domestic violence because of budget cuts. The district attorney stopped prosecuting domestic violence cases, because of budget cuts, which meant the city had to prosecute the cases. They found it too expensive, so decided to do away with their domestic violence laws. The DA did eventually take up the cases again, but the repeal of their domestic violence laws still stands in Topeka City law. ([New York Times](#))

I wanted to give you that information a little slowly, so that you could take it in.

Jesus' message was radical when he preached it, and it is just as radical today. We are called out into a materialistic, and hurting, and unjust world. We are called to be like the disciples, unlikely world changers. We are humble, weak, cowardly, broken, foolish, hurt people. But we are precious in the eyes of God. We have to give up a lot to follow Jesus, but what we get in return is of incalculable value! We get to be co-creators with God of this new Kingdom of love and justice. We get to live into who it is that God created us to be! Unlikely world changers. We just need to pick up our cross and follow him.