



When I survey this world there are those times in life that make sense, in other words I don't have to waste too much time thinking about what just happened, because it's just that obvious, but then there arise those moments that are a lot more difficult to understand. In fact coming to grips with these cold realities can be downright frustrating! For example, for me it makes sense that a terrorist would be killed by his own bomb, it makes sense that a reckless or drunk driver would be in a serious car accident, and it makes sense that when someone plays with fire they could get burned.

I still recall the day as a child standing in front of my elementary school holding on to a "fat boy", no not a large child, but a big firecracker. And for whatever reason, I held on just a little too long when this baby exploded. I thought based on how I felt, that I just blew off two to three of my fingers; it took me a number of minutes to finally have the courage to even look. As stupid as that was...guess what when you play with fire, you can get burned...I understand that...

But then there are those moments, those times that I really just don't understand...like the innocent men, women and children that are also taken out of this life by that same terrorist bomb? What about those road side construction workers, or other innocent people that are, either severely injured, or killed by that drunk driver? What about that family that loses their home to fire, to no fault of their own, outside of a neighbor's kid fooling around with combustibles?

You see, it's during these moments I begin to struggle, and I'm left asking questions like "Why God?" "Where were you?" "I thought you were on our side?" and I'm pretty sure I'm not alone...in fact another gentleman in the midst of his confusion with life, finally out of total frustration found himself crying out to God... (Job 10: 1-12) ***"I can't stand my life—I hate it! I'm putting it all out on the table, all the bitterness of my life—I'm holding back nothing." "Here's what I want to say: Don't, God, bring in a verdict of guilty without letting me know the charges you're bringing. How does this fit into what you once called 'good'— giving me a hard time, spurning me, a life you shaped by your very own hands, and then blessing the plots of the wicked?"***

You don't look at things the way we mortals do. You're not taken in by appearances, are you? Unlike us, you're not working against a deadline. You have all eternity to work things out. So what's this all about, anyway—this compulsion to dig up some dirt, to find some skeleton in my closet? You know good and well I'm not guilty. You also know no one can help me.

"You made me like a handcrafted piece of pottery—and now are you going to smash me to pieces? Don't you remember how beautifully you worked my clay? Will you reduce me now to a mud pie?"

You see here was a righteous and innocent man, but based on what was going on his life you would have thought otherwise! In fact this was exactly what his friends assumed; somehow he had got on God's wrong side, he was in one corner and God

was in the other...his name was Job, and mud pie is not exactly the vessel I'm sure Job envisioned, and neither would I.

This is our second week together, and a premise that I have been working under is that God who created us desires to shape us, mold us, and form us to become this vessel, this human being that exemplifies everything that God stands for, but as Job exclaimed, reality has a way of getting in the way, and at times it appears like God is willing for us to be totally demolished, smashed to tiny fragments or worse, reduced to mud pie. It was John Stott who said, "*The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to Christianity.*"

Because the truth is, like with Job and countless others, the answer to the question "Is God good?" isn't always as easy to answer as you think. Because if God is good and compassionate, why can life be so tragic? Has God lost control? In fact in trying to come to terms with life and God some people have chosen to deny God's existence because they cannot imagine a God who would allow such misery.

Some people believe that God exists, but they want nothing to do with Him because they don't think he could be good.

Others have settled for a belief in a kindly God who loves us but has lost control of a rebellious planet. Still others cling tenaciously to a belief in an all wise, all powerful loving God who somehow uses evil for good...I being one of those...that believe our God has given us enough pieces of this puzzle of life, to help us trust Him, even when we don't have all the information we would like, such was the predicament the disciple Peter found himself in on more than one occasion.

Last week we began a series on Peter, one of Christ's closest friends. We saw how within the twelve disciples Jesus was particularly close to what has come to be known as "the three", Peter, James and John, and it was from within these three we know that Peter had developed an even deeper relationship with Jesus.

We asked the simple question...why? Why Peter? What was the secret to this relationship? It obviously had nothing to do with having an impeccable record when it came to performance, because Peter was often on the failing side of things. It wasn't because of the "disciple material" that existed within Peter, in fact again quite the opposite, the very fact Peter was a fisherman in his day when Jesus met him, proved he had not make the cut spiritually, and was nowhere near the standards of that day for discipleship material.

So here was a guy, flawed, rough around the edges by all standards, a man who himself willingly admitted he was a great sinner...ahhh...bingo! Last week's conclusion...one of the key components to this relationship with God...here was an individual willing to be honest about himself. The issue we observed with God wasn't the presence of sin in humanity, that apparently is a given, the real problem arises with our unwillingness or refusal to deal with that sin!

So Peter, with his obvious issues, is surprisingly handpicked by God Himself...honestly...wouldn't have been my first choice, especially for the scope of the task at hand ...mankind's spiritual survival. Now if it was Peter picking Jesus, this I

understand! Think about it, God is now in your corner, on your team. Need to cross the Lake by foot...not an issue! A little short on the munchies...uhhh Jesus! He's dead! Define dead...especially if you're God.

I'm thinking the followers of Jesus are taking full advantage of the presence of the Creator as they walk among mere mortal man! What could possibly go wrong? Well as Peter discovered...actually quite a bit! Daily challenges, more than a few discomforts, a number of life surprises, and did I mention plenty of confusion and fear! Not what you would expect from a stacked team is it? What happened to the advantage, because on more than a few occasions it appears Peter wasn't feeling all that different from Job when he cried out,

"I can't stand my life—I hate it! I'm putting it all out on the table, all the bitterness of my life—I'm holding back nothing...How does this fit into what you once called 'good'— giving me a hard time...You made me like a handcrafted piece of pottery—and now are you going to smash me to pieces? Don't you remember how beautifully you worked my clay? Will you reduce me now to a mud pie?"

So have you ever felt like mud pie? Having a few problems reconciling a good God with your life? So how does Peter reconcile God being good, and what life can than throw at you? How does Peter reconcile having the league's most stacked player and still losing so often? Remember Jesus did end up being beaten, flogged and strung up on a cross, with everyone assuming he was down and out for the count!

In fact at one point Peter was so discouraged, even after all the indications by Jesus of His impending death and resurrection, even after the body goes missing we read in Luke 24:12 **"Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened."**

Has your belief system left you wondering what just happened? Maybe we need to apply another basic principle that Peter exemplified in his life, another characteristic that I'm sure Jesus was drawn too. It wasn't all that complicated either. Sometimes in life the simplest of truths can have far reaching implications, but as well can become the most difficult to grasp, or at times the quickest to forget!

For example the law of gravity really is a simple reality. It exists, and we live accordingly...or we should, but not everybody does, and when we try to fight this truth, or choose to ignore the consequences, some high prices are paid! "You reap what you sow" is another such truth, five simple words, but the extent of this truth is enormous! So what was this basic principle Peter possessed, allow me to show you!

One day Jesus is preaching on the shore line, great crowds have pressed in on him, and were told Jesus notices two empty boats at the water's edge, stepping into one of the boats Jesus asked Simon to push it out into the water, and from here he taught the crowds. Upon finishing speaking he turns to Simon and states, **"Now go out where it is deeper and let down your nets, and you will catch many fish."** **"Master", Simon replied, 'we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so,**

we'll try again.' And this time their nets were so full they began to tear! A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking. Luke 5:1-11

Peter has now been with Jesus the carpenter for several months; it's been almost a year since he met Jesus, and I'm sure Peter has had his ups and downs, his highs and lows. In fact that very morning he's sounding pretty tired, what was it he just told Jesus, "...***we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing...***" My guess, the nets are already washed and stored away, and Peter, who by the way is the only disciple ever to say "no" to Jesus comes dangerously close this time as well, but finally simply states, ***"But if you say so..."***

There it is! Five more key words! ***"But if you say so..."***

In other words the only reason I'm going to do this Jesus... is because "you" asked. This became a guiding principle for Peter's life. The simple command of Jesus will eventually be all it takes to move Peter. Take the time the disciples were terrified of what they first assumed was a ghost when Jesus walked on the water towards their boat as we read in Matthew 14:28... ***"Lord, if it's you." Peter replied, "Tell me to come to you on the water." "Come" he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on water and came toward Jesus.*** One word was all it took, "Come".

Peter wasn't one of these "Luke warm" kind of guys, it was all or nothing...good thing because wasn't it Jesus who said

"Because you are lukewarm-neither hot nor cold-I am about to spit you out of my mouth." (Rev 3:16) Apparently Jesus didn't have a lot of tolerance for a 'ride the fence' mentality, or coaching from the sidelines!

This key component of Peter's faith journey would become far more vital than he probably ever realized, especially concerning the relationship between the existence of suffering, things going awry and God's goodness...but what I want us to pay particular attention too is Peter's peculiar reaction at this time!

We read the fish appeared from nowhere, nets are tearing, more help is required and fish stories are beginning to formulate. It was amazing, now it wasn't no walking on water, or Lazarus rising from the grave, but come on it was cool, it was the mother lode, it was what legends are made of, especially for fisherman.

Now in response to this miraculous catch, we would assume the natural reaction, amazement, excitement, even a little hyperactivity, something you would expect from any fisherman who just hauled in the "big one", but I want you to take note of what Peter actually asks for in response to this haul. Peter actually asks for something deep down he really doesn't want to happen – he asks for Jesus to leave.

Listen up ***"When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, 'Oh Lord, please leave me – I'm too much of a sinner to be around you.' For he was awestruck by the size of their catch...Jesus replied to Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on you'll be fishing for people!' And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus."***

Here`s a great visual as pointed out by the author Michael Card, *“Peter has actually become the frightened fish thrashing in the net, wanting only to get away or at least for Jesus to get away from him.”* Again...a simple question I ask...why? Why has fear struck so deeply, what is it that Peter is seeing that brings such an emotional challenge to him, that he desires Jesus to leave!

Obviously the fish themselves didn’t scare him; a few torn nets could easily be repaired, so what was the big deal, why did Jesus even have to say, **“Don’t be afraid.”** Now I understand, as Peter had already discovered that whenever Jesus reveals his true nature in a new way, the first words from Christ’s lips are “Don’t be afraid”.

When he calms the storm, when he walks on water, when Jesus is transfigured by this blazing light, or when he is raised from the dead, each time Jesus comforts and calms Peter with these words, **“Don’t be afraid.”** In each instance when the veil is momentarily lifted and Peter has this terrifying realization that he, a veteran sinner, is in the presence of undiminished Deity, it totally undoes him, as it should, but to be told “Don’t be afraid” in each of these incidents, well that makes sense.

If you thought you saw a ghost, fear is understandable, if you think your boat is about to go under in the middle of the Sea, fear can be a good friend, but what, I ask, is so fearful about a net full of fish?

Here’s a guess...it’s not the fish...it’s Peter! He’s entangled in a net...a web of thinking and beliefs that over the years have left him tired, faithless, and skeptical, and he of all people knows this. Peter has just found himself face to face with something that we would all assume we want, but in reality when we end up with it, it actually freaks us out...and that is when we encounter complete success in light of God’s goodness...but this in no thanks to our own efforts.

We understand perfectly well that our motives are often flawed, that our goals are stained with selfishness, and that our hearts are often callous, and yet God chooses to show up, despite us!

According to polls, our latest statistics and the professionals, the going thought is that most of us, if not all, would agree with the statement, *“I am disappointed with myself.”* I know how many of us struggle with self-image and self-esteem. When I read Alan Greenspan’s autobiography entitled “The Age of Turbulence” what I found fascinating are the insights to humanity coming from this economist. Listen to his following words...

“We rarely look closely at the principal operating unit of economic activity; the human being. What are we? What is fixed in our nature and not subject to change – and how much discretion and free will do we have to act and learn? I have been struggling with this question since I first knew to ask it. As I’ve traveled across the globe for nearly six decades, I have found that people exhibit remarkable similarities that by no stretch of the imagination can be construed as resulting from culture, history, language, or chance. All people appear motivated by an inbred striving for self-esteem that is in large part fostered by the approval of others. That striving determines much of what households spend their money on.”

The pursuit of Self-esteem and the approval of others...a reality that countless billions will spend countless trillions to achieve! So much so it drives entire nation's economies! We become so dissatisfied with ourselves we stop at nothing to overcome our shortcomings.

Now some of the disappointment we experience with ourselves is trivial, I wish I had more hair...or Brad Pitts looks, but at times the disappointment runs much deeper. "How could I have said those words to the ones I love so dearly?" "How could I have treated that person so unfairly, lied the way I did, stole what wasn't mine, how could I have physically hurt another human being?"

If I was brutally honest...I find myself disappointed that I still love God so little and sin so much! I am embarrassingly sinful! I do not pray very much, I very easily can drift into a fantasy of angry revenge over the slightest event. I am defensive, I do struggle with forgiving certain people, and I can convince people I'm busy and productive and yet waste huge amount of time watching television.

And these are just a few of my disappointments, there are many more, and there are deeper ones! I love how one author put it, *"In fact sometimes although I am keenly aware of just how far I have fallen, it doesn't bother me much...and then I'm disappointed at my lack of disappointment."* How true!

Is it any wonder Peter wanted Jesus to leave? Is it any wonder why at times we want God out of our lives, why we give up on church? Because in light of the truth...were embarrassed, like Peter! Peter was disappointed with himself? He forgot who he was with, that despite the circumstances, the no luck fishing the night before, Jesus was going to do something special, and catching a few fish was definitely simpler than many of the other miracles performed to date!

And yet here was Peter questioning him once again...his only saving grace... **"But if you say so..."** How many of us have taken ourselves out of the picture? We have become satisfied riding the bench so to speak? We have considered our circumstances and have made some wrong assumptions about the will of God and His abilities, or question His love for us.

I was thinking about this just last week, as I was sitting in front of my computer looking at a picture of my best friend who was at that time in China holding their newly adopted infant little girl. He has this grin on his face that I recognized as a satisfaction that was a long time in the waiting. It's been a very long journey for them to finally get to this point in their lives!

As I'm enjoying their happiness, suddenly I had this thought. God, who is not restricted to time and space was there, but five years ago when this whole process began, God had already in a sense experienced this moment. It was and is a reality for Him now in the present and back than in the past, for God...nothing has changed! Now think about this for a moment, all the pain my friend and his wife went through in this whole process,

the doubting, the questions, the “why us” questions were the farthest thing from their minds last week, all forgotten as they held their perfect little girl.

So could you imagine the stress free life they could have experienced had they, like God seen this day coming? How much do we miss out on because we don't trust our God and His promises, that ultimately regardless of what we are facing today, God already sees what awaits us, and if we have put our trust in Him, in comparison to what He sees and knows as a reality, we will be so full of regret for the amount of time we spent in worry, anger, or fear concerning these life issues...the negative energy we have invested.

That's why Jesus was pretty straight forward when he said, **“O you of little faith? So do not worry...but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow...”** (Matthew 6:34) In other words, I'm already there...I know what's coming... I love how John records Christ's words in John 14:1-3 capturing this very truth, **“Do not let your hearts be trouble. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you.”**

In other words Jesus basically is saying, “Been there...done that” and it's going to be good! In fact it's so good, that even a taste of it would be enough to get you through anything that this life can throw at you. But like so many of us Peter momentarily waivers, and He calls into question his role on the team...he's feeling more like a pylon than a contributing member.

John Ortberg in his book *“The Life You've Always Wanted”* talks about one of the most profound statements concerning this human condition he has ever heard, and he heard it first when he was only five. It came from his hero, Popeye the Sailor Man. You see when Popeye was frustrated or wasn't sure what to do or felt inadequate he would simply say, *“I yam what I yam.”*

Like Peter, Popeye was not a sophisticated guy, not known for his intellectualism, but like Peter, he knew who he was, a simple, sea-faring man, who wasn't about to pretend to be anything else. In other words he owned his story, *“I yam what I yam.”* For Peter it was, ***‘Oh Lord, please leave me – I'm too much of a sinner to be around you.’***

Now...here's where honesty can actually get in the way of God using you! Here's where our disappointment in ourselves can become a hindrance to our spiritual growth. Do we allow our present condition to keep us from what God had in mind and in store, and remain sitting on the bench watching the game like a spectator? Is it enough to simply recognize “I Yam what I yam”, a sinner, and end up asking for what we really don't want...God to leave, in light of our condition?

Is it enough to live with who we are, to remain satisfied with our present condition and in fact use that as an excuse for our shortcomings, that God shouldn't expect any more from me? That I shouldn't expect any more from myself?

I'm afraid this has become the sad cry of far too many! We all have said these words in one way or another! We do it when we remove God from the picture, when we can't reconcile a good God and our disappointing lives, or life's disappointing moments. We remove Him from the central role he longs to play in our lives and we refuse to "let God be God" and often appoint ourselves in his place, "I yam what I yam."

But that is by far not all that there is, that is not all that I am. You and I are called to become the person God had in mind when he originally designed us, and that is not mud pie! This is what is behind Kierkegaard's wonderful prayer, "*And now Lord, with your help I shall become myself.*" The Apostle Paul describes this holy and mysterious process, "***...in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you?***" Galatians 4:19 There is a continuous work going on in your lives.

The goal of such growth is to live as if Jesus held this complete control over our bodies; we are called by God to live as our uniquely created selves – with our temperament, our gene pool, our baggage, our history, and our stories whatever they may entail. Yes Peter was a sinner, yes you and I are sinners, and we give plenty of reasons to be disappointed, but it doesn't have to stop there! Jesus does not have to leave.

"But if you say so Jesus..." I don't understand it, and I'm not sure I ever will on this side of the grave, but who am I to question God, because like Peter, deep down I can answer the question, God is good with a very strong yes.

And in spite of Peter's lack of faith, his questioning of the Masters advice, in spite of his natural thoughts, God chose to bless him that day with generosity he did not deserve, just another reminder of how great God is, and how sinful we are! The same generosity that gives us life when we deserve death, hope when we should be sulking in misery.

So Jesus knowing Peter's battle within says ***"Peter, don't be afraid."*** Simon Peter "fear not", your sinfulness will ultimately be dealt with, because of my presence, your sin, your weakened state can never stand between me and you. In fact Peter's confession of his sinfulness means he is precisely the man for whom Jesus is looking for. In fact in keeping with his character, Peter is the very first person to confess his sinfulness to Jesus.

Christ has arrived, and the line between the worlds of the OT and the New are now clearly drawn in the sand beside the lake. In the OT, having faith meant waiting faithfully for God to make good on his promises, in the NT world, faith means only one thing: following Jesus. ***"But if you say so..."*** Not only did the four of them walk away from their nets and boats, they left behind a net full of fish to follow Jesus.

If we are going to be honest with ourselves, we will have to admit, that for us to follow, to leave everything behind – is an absolutely terrifying prospect, and a more accurate picture...our most natural response would be, like Peter to fall down and say "Go away" This is more than I can deal with, I couldn't be the person you're looking for. So here we stand before these terrifying possibilities – to let go of our security, to open ourselves to the frightening possibility of complete and utter success, to leave all that is familiar and safe for an unknown world.

But let's also not forget that Jesus is also standing beside us, and he is confidently whispering to you, "Don't be afraid." Let go of the nets, let go of your old life, and do not be afraid, after all, it's me...God. This was a pivotal moment for Peter; Jesus informs him he has a bigger purpose, fishing for human lives, and he has been picked for the team, and what is at stake goes far beyond what Peter could ever imagine, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!

The implications of this truth were staggering! You see far too often we think of our spiritual lives as just one more aspect of our existence, alongside and largely separate from our financial lives, our vocational lives or even our family life. Once in awhile we may say I need to get my spiritual life together? Maybe I'll start to pray more, read the Bible, shoot I may even try out church and that's why you are here this morning.

But the truth is that the term "spiritual life" is simply a way of referring to one's life, period, every moment, every facet, from God's perspective. You see God's not interested in your "spiritual life" God is just interested in your life. He intends to redeem it. Jesus came and announced good news, the gospel which is the announcement of the existence and availability of another dimension of existence, another world, ***"The Kingdom of God has come near."***

And yes in light of this reality, in light of God's existence and His character life can make sense even when it is disappointing, because God is good, and He works from a perspective that we only have scratched the surface of.

The kingdom of God is closer than you think, and it is available to the Peters of life, the ordinary men and women of this planet. It is available to people who have never thought of themselves as religious or spiritual. It is available to you...you can live it now!

Like Simons name change to Peter signified a transformation, our story, your story is a story of transformation. You will not always be as you are now, the day is coming when you will be something incomparably better or worse, it all depends on how well you know God! Is God good? You see God holds out the possibility of transformation, the choice remains ours.

A choice, biblical greats like Moses had to make, a nobody, a shepherd called to a task that was unimaginable, free millions from Egyptian rule, *"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? Moses asked. "Nobody knows me. I am slow of speech and slow of tongue. I am disappointed in myself. I yam what I yam."*

God said to Moses what he has said to you and me and millions of other Moseses: *"I know all about that. It doesn't really matter much. For I will be with you. Your guilt and your inadequacies are no longer the ultimate truth about you. You are what you are – but that's not all that you are. You are what you are, but you are not yet what you will be. I will be with you."*

Interestingly enough Moses responds with the question based on the premise I started out with, *"Who are you God?" What if I go to these people and tell them God sent me, and they ask your name – what should I tell them?"*

God answered, ***“I am what I am.”*** You see God wants to be known intimately by name. This same God has already been active in human history, ready to transform anyone then or now who is willing to turn aside before a burning bush: He said ***“I am the God of Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac, and Rebekah; I am the God who cares for my people. I have seen the misery of my children when they thought I was not looking. I have heard their groans when they thought I was not listening. I am the God who saw you in the reeds when you were hidden, in the desert when you fled as a fugitive.”***

You see God was already there, in the past, present and future! He knows the ending! He knows our ending, and that’s why He can say, **“In all things God works for the good of those who love Him...”** Romans 8:28 It becomes our choice as to how to respond to this truth.

The good news as Jesus preached it is not about the minimal entrance requirements for getting into heaven when you die. It is about the glorious redemption of human life – your life...so don’t waste it...learn to love our good God, and than watch as how he will use you to do great things ...despite yourself. **“But if you say so...”**

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