

Slide 1 (family photo)

This is a snapshot of the extended family I'm part of.

Let's pray: *Heavenly Father, through weak human words, give us grace to hear your true and living word, Jesus Christ our Lord, and so transform us by your Holy Spirit that we may respond to your love with our hearts and our wills committed to you and your service in this world. Amen.*

Slide 2 Simon Peter

We're going to look at Simon Peter this morning. I wonder what his family photo would look like! What do we know about Peter? Call it out...

Actually, I do have a few pictures of Peter...

Slide 3 Here he tried walking on water in the storm and Jesus is rescuing him.

Slide 4 Peter was one of the intimate three (James & John) at the transfiguration of Jesus.

Slide 5 Jesus said that Peter would deny him three times before the rooster crowed.

Slide 6 Here Peter is bitterly weeping aloud after he had done just that.

Slide 7 And then here he is boldly preaching the gospel. What a transformation!

What took him from this (**Slide 6**) to this (**Slide 7**)?

He had a defining moment: a watershed. **Slide 8** (Out of the water and into a watershed)

A watershed is an event marking a turning point or a change of perspective. We're going to look at a turning point in Peter's life. In John 21 Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him. He tells him three times to care for his sheep, and to follow him without comparing himself to the others.

Let me give you some background:

It has been a couple of weeks since that awful Friday when Jesus died on a cross. Some of the women saw him on Sunday morning, but when Peter and John ran there, the tomb was empty. Jesus appeared to two guys out walking to Emmaus later that same afternoon and they recognized him when he blessed and broke the bread for dinner. They came straight back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples, and then that very same night Jesus appeared in the upper room. They couldn't believe their eyes, so he ate some fish to prove that he wasn't a ghost or a figment of their frightened imaginations. Fear and joy, disbelief and wonder! About a week later, it happened again, and Thomas was there that time. Jesus had said he would meet the disciples in Galilee, so some of them went up there, back to their home turf.

That's the background. So now we're going to enter into the story using our imaginations. You may like to close your eyes. Pay attention to the details: What do you notice? What are the sights, sounds, tastes, and smells? What are the attitudes, feelings and relationships? What stands out to you? So relax, take a few deep breaths, listen and imagine yourself there beside the sea in Galilee with some of the disciples. Are you ready? Can you hear the sea?

So there we were, restless and waiting with nothing much to do. Peter said, "I'm going fishing," so we all went with him. This was what most of us knew, and none of us wanted to be left alone. We were out all night but we caught absolutely nothing. Just after dawn, we were quite close to the shore and we spotted a guy on the beach who called out and asked if we had caught any fish. "Ah, nah," we sheepishly admitted. He told us to throw our net out - off the right side of the boat. Who did he think he was? We were in shallow water. But we were too tired to argue, so we did,

and blow me down if that net wasn't bulging with fish. We could barely hold it! Then John must have got that déjà vu feeling. Yeah. This had happened before when Jesus first called Peter, James and John to follow him. Peter tried to argue with Jesus but did what Jesus said. We nearly sank with the size of that catch. We had left all that that day - to follow Jesus.

Like I said, John had that déjà vu feeling and said to Peter, "It's the Lord!" We all had goose bumps but you should have seen Peter move! He grabbed his shirt and jumped into the sea. Ha! We'd seen him do that before and nearly drown, but Jesus was right there to save him. Was he really here now?

By the time we got to shore there was fish and bread cooking on a fire. Mm-mmm. We were hungry and - it was Jesus! It really was Jesus. He told us to bring some of our fish too, so Peter joined us and together we all pulled the net in without ripping it. Jesus said to come and eat. We didn't know what to say - to him or to each other. Ah, it was just so good to see him. He gave us bread and fish to eat and we ate. He fed us and we just took it all in.

Slide 9 When we finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."

A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep."

Slide 10 Jesus said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. After this he said to him, "Follow me."

Do you love me more than these? Do you love me? Do you love me? How do I respond? Let's take a minute silence to ponder what the Holy Spirit has shown you, or try to name the main feeling or thought you experienced.

Ok. Open your eyes. What is going on here? Actually there are many things because God's word is so profound and powerful, but one thing is this: Jesus is challenging Peter to be committed to love.

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This is a watershed moment in Peter's life, from which he walks on, with a Christ-centred confidence and freedom that we'll continue to see as we return to the book of Acts over the next weeks. Is Peter committed to love?

In English, we have this one word *love* but it can mean many different things. So what does it mean to be committed to love? In this passage there are two Greek words for love: *agape* and *phileo*. Both mean love.

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The first two times, Jesus asks if Peter loves him using the word *agape*. The third time, Jesus uses the word *phileo*. Peter always responds that he loves Jesus with *phileo*.

There is a lot written about this and a range of opinions, so I offer my brief conclusions:

- These two words are not translated differently in most of your Bibles because they are often used interchangeably, and one is not superior to the other. They both mean love.

- *Agape* is used about five times more often than *phileo* because it has a wider application. A good example of this is the verse Mark used last week (talking about the world wide web): *Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world.* 1 Jn 2:15 They are all *agape*!
- Also, Peter uses both of these words several times even in the same sentence in his two letters.

In Thailand there is a delightful phrase: "Same same but different." If we read the Amplified or Greek Bible, we can see there is some difference:

Slide 13 Love and Love

Phileo: to love with deep personal affection as for a close friend, involves sentimental feeling of the heart

Agape: to love with total commitment and devotion, involves a deliberate decision of the will and intentional good judgment based on a morally blameless standard.

Peter had boasted that even if the others fell away, he wouldn't, but within hours he denied even knowing Jesus. So, I wonder if Jesus was asking Peter if he was still so full of himself or if there was room for humility and dependence on Christ for the task ahead.

You see, when love is a feeling, it is simply wonderful. But there are times in our relationships, where the feeling of love is absent and we need to choose to be committed to love. Mark and I had one of those this week! 😊

To love with *agape* - a deliberate decision of the will - is a tall order. We need Jesus' help to love like that. And it can be painful!

I remember a watershed time in my life when I was struggling because, like Peter, I felt God was asking more of me than I thought I had to give. We were missionaries in Thailand and in a family crisis. I had been using my camera as a way of paying attention to what God was showing me. This day, I was hurting, asking WHY? and wondering where God was in it all. Mark and I went for a silent walk. Join us:

Slide 14 Mud puddle

I'm too sad for words, not knowing if I want to be alone or if I'm too scared to be alone. I spend my energy breathing and walking. My eyes are wet and my heart swollen. There is anger there somewhere too. We navigate the mud on the track. Mud. I look at the mud and wonder if I have the capacity to find God in anything today. 'So God, can you speak to me in the mud?' Silence. But my body resonates connection with the churned-up, tyre-preserved mud. I like the mud. I identify with it. I keep walking and then my attention is drawn to the light reflected in a muddy puddle.

Slide 15 Sky in mud puddle

I start to compose a photo and the words come so clearly: 'So Viv, can you see sky in a mud puddle?' This touches my heart deeply and I gasp: 'Yes Lord, I want to see.'

My whole perspective shifted! Was I focusing on seeing the mud, or could I learn to see the sky reflected in it? Was I focusing on the hard stuff of my life, or could I trust God through it? God continued to speak to me through this snapshot during a dark year and challenged me to trust him as he was shaping and forming me, even in the darkness.

If we let God, he will shape and form us into more than we could imagine. Peter understood what this means. This is what he wrote in a letter, and remember that his name means "rock":

Slide 16 (1 Peter 2:4-5 NRSV)

You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honour. And you are living stones that **God is building into a spiritual house**. We are living stones being built into a spiritual house!

CS Lewis puts it this way:

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"Imagine yourself a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps you can understand what he is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing so you are not surprised. But presently he starts **knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense**. What on earth is he up to?

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The explanation is that he is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but he is building a palace."

A palace – ouch! That's way more than I had reckoned on!

But a warm fuzzy lovey belief in God will not sustain us through the inevitable hard times, as God builds us into a palace and we build his kingdom on earth.

Our Christian faith is not about feeling comfortable now and going to an eternal happiness in heaven.

It is about following Jesus with a committed love (our hearts and our wills) that walks humbly, loves mercy and acts justly in this very broken world.

But how can we do this, especially if we are in the disorientation of change or in a place of hurt as Peter was right then?

We can be committed to love when we experience the forgiving love of Jesus. Jesus loved Peter! There is no doubt about that. Here are three snapshots of Jesus' heart for Peter:

Slide 19

- First snapshot is the angel at the tomb who said to the women: *Jesus is risen. Go, tell his disciples **and Peter**, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee.* (Mark 16:7) Two words: AND PETER! Make sure you don't leave him out just because he messed up.
- Second snapshot: the two from Emmaus have just come back and told the disciples about seeing Jesus. The disciples say: *The Lord has really risen! **He has appeared to Peter.*** (Luke 24:34) This suggests a private audience between Jesus and Peter. Oh to be a fly on that wall! I wonder what was said.
- And the third snapshot is at the last supper, before Jesus died. The disciples had been squabbling over who would be the greatest. Jesus said *"Peter, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But **I have prayed for you, Peter**, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."* (Luke 22:31-32) Doesn't that sound like "Feed my sheep?" Jesus prayed for Peter ahead of time.

Jesus was affirming his love for Peter. Notice that Jesus did not reject him or give the task to someone else. He was reinstating Peter there at the sea of Galilee.

What are the snapshots in your life of God's love for you? What is it like to know that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are constantly praying for you? (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:26-27, 34)

I'm going to close with a snapshot I recently had of God's incredible love for me. I was walking on a stony beach in one of those soul-honest moments of confession: *"Lord, I just don't feel your favour in my life right now."* I looked down and there was a beautiful piece of paua shell.

Slide 20

I picked it up and thanked God for this beautiful, broken piece of shimmering colour. *"Thank you Lord, but I'd really love a whole paua shell. Is that too much to ask?"* I walked back the way I came and at my feet was a whole paua shell. I picked it up and thanked God. *"Wow. This is wonderful. Lord, and I am satisfied with your loving kindness, but... well.. could I have a small one that I can hold in the palm of my hand?"* I kept walking and there was a whole small paua shell. I was beginning to get the message that God loves me. Actually, it was like God was saying, "Viv, if you want paua shells, I can do paua shells! I want you to have no doubts of my lavish love for you."

Slide 21

You know, I picked up a dozen paua shells! How could I doubt God's love for me? My heaviness was lifted and my heart was refreshed.

How have you experienced God's love recently?
Are we committed to love Jesus and follow him in this world?

Let's pray:

Dear Lord, Thank you for your lavish, forgiving love for us. Help us to let you build us into your spiritual palace, even when it hurts. Please refresh our hearts as we renew our commitment to love you with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind and will, and with all of our strength. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Refresh my heart, Lord,
Renew my love,
Pour Your Spirit into my soul,
Refresh my heart.
You set me apart, Lord,
To make me new,
By Your Spirit,
Lift me up, Lord,
Refresh my heart.

And I will worship You, Lord,
With all of my heart,
And I will follow You, Lord,
Refresh my heart.

You've graced my life Lord,
Love overcomes
Mercy's goodness, forgiveness found
You've graced my life.
You crown me with mercy
My hope renewed
By your spirit lifted up
You've graced my life.