

The Apostle Peter's Provincial Life

We heard last week how Jesus was not received in His own hometown. How his own people turned against Him and sought to end His life by throwing Him off a cliff. Familiarity breeds contempt, and the hometown crowds were quite contemptible towards our Lord. Jesus may not have been received in His own country, but He was accepted by a certain kind. He surrounded Himself with individuals, men and women, who understood His cause and believed in His mission. Well...sort of. Let's just say, they really wanted to understand even when they could not fully understand. No one embodies this eager spirit to believe quite like the apostle Peter. Of all the those who followed Christ, Peter stands out as the most real amongst them. What's interesting about our text this morning is that we hear how Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. Now besides the whole miracle of healing and Jesus' amazing ability to circumvent nature's course, what struck me about our reading is how real of picture it paints of Christ's chief disciple; I mean, Peter had a mother-in-law, for goodness' sake. Part of the disadvantage of our being so far removed from biblical times, is that we have a tendency to idealize the past, and because we do this, we tend to overlook the realness of it all. We look at the biblical characters from a distance, and this distance, unfortunately, makes them appear plastic and one-dimensional. But history is rarely monochromatic, and people even less so. Peter was a real flesh and blood person. Before Jesus' call to discipleship, He had a life—a wife, a family, a job. His life was full of ups and downs, good days and bad days, responsibilities and stresses just like the rest of us. He was not just some disillusioned individual standing on the fringes of society. He had a full life, perhaps we might even say a good life. Christ, of course, honored Him with a Divine Call into service, but that doesn't mean it was easy for Peter to leave it all behind.

Sometimes our Lord does things that seem highly illogical to us. Seeing how Peter had a lot to lose, why did Christ choose him of all people? Surely, there must have been other young men available, men who had little in the way of responsibility. Wouldn't they have made better candidates for such a dangerous and nomadic lifestyle? I'm certain I don't have an answer as to why God does what He does, no less why Christ chose Peter. But somewhere hidden in the Divine Counsel, God created Peter for just such an occasion. Peter was chosen for just such a moment in history. Of course, Peter could have said "No" to Christ's call to follow Him, but his refusal would have been received in the same way as Jonah's; that is not at all. Peter probably had a whole life planned

out for himself, but it wasn't his destiny to live quietly by the seashore. Peter's future plans were eclipsed by the ultimate plan of God. For had God not altered Peter's plans, we would not be here today. It's just that simple. Peter was called away from all that he knew, all that he loved, but through his sacrifice God raised up a new way of life for all of humanity. Peter became homeless so that we might find our home in the Church, which Christ so lovingly established upon the rock of Peter's confession. Peter left his own family so that we might be a family as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Peter found a new identity in Christ, and we are the beneficiaries of it. The twists and turns of history brought us all here today. Destiny is not something we talk about much anymore. I suppose it has something to do with human agency. We all suffer from the delusion that we are in control; that we shape our own course and make our own destiny. But any serious attention given to God's Word proves the opposite. God's Word reveals a hidden destiny for all mankind, which emerges out of what appears like random chaos. God's good and gracious Will moves history forward towards an ultimate redemption in Christ. If it were not so, we would be lost to the vicissitudes of life. John Lennon once said, "life happens when you are busy making other plans." I've always liked that quote because there is a lot of truth in it. But perhaps an even better way to say it is, "man proposes, but God disposes." This seems to fit Biblical truth much better. We assume we know best. We assume that we are capable of cobbling together a meaningful life for ourselves. And so, we put our focus here or our attention there, but more often than not we are like the blind leading the blind. Who knows where we are going or what we are doing? Only God knows....and that's a really good thing. Peter's life, and God's reorganization of it, gives us confidence to believe in Providence. Just recently someone told me I don't talk as much as I used to. I suppose that's true, as far as it goes. I guess the older I get the less I have to say to the world at large, and the more I have to say to God in prayer. In my youthful exuberance, I believed I could change the world. It's taken a long time, but I'm just now starting to realize how foolish and misguided such a thought really is. Only God can bring about real change- in my life, in yours, in the world. Who knows the future, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, but who would even want to? The joy of life is that it unfolds before us like a surprise. It's the mystery of it all that adds zest. Life is volatile and messy and unpredictable. Life is like a stormy sea, but somewhere beneath the choppy waters is the calm of God. Amen.