

## Pastor Colleen's Sermon of September 13, 2009

**Grace, Peace and Mercy be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen**

Have you ever heard the sound of a heart breaking?

Do you remember what it sounds like?

Maybe it was your child's heart breaking the first time someone they loved disappointed or left them.

Or maybe it was your sister's heart breaking when the doctor called to say the cancer was back.

Maybe it was your friend's heart breaking when he called to say that his marriage was over.

Or maybe it was your own heart breaking when you found out your job was being outsourced or eliminated.

Have you ever heard the sound of a heart breaking?

Do you remember what it sounds like?

I think we hear that sound in today's gospel reading.

It might be hard to detect at first;

but if we listen closely,

I think we can actually hear a human heart tremble and fracture amid severe disappointment and shame.

You see, it happens as Jesus is walking with his disciples.

And he asks them what people are saying about him.

And the disciples do not disappoint,

They report that the crowds indeed recognize that Jesus is clearly a prophet, and a holy man of God.

But then Jesus gets to what seems like his real question,

asking the disciples themselves, directly,

"But who do you say that I am?"

And Peter declares that Jesus isn't just a prophet

but that he is actually the long-awaited Messiah.

YES!!

Peter absolutely gets this one right.

And we'll never know whether that confession had been brewing in Peter for some time and Peter had just been waiting for the chance to share it

or whether this confession came to him in a flash of divinely guided insight.

But regardless, it's not hard to imagine that making that confession had to be one of the best moments in Peter's life.

For there's something so wonderful about recognizing and participating in a truth bigger than yourself,

about naming truth in a way that somehow makes it more true in your own experience.

It's like saying "I love you" for the first time to someone and in saying it realizing just how true it is,

even truer than it was just a moment before.

That's what happens with Peter,

with that confession his heart,  
brimming over with insight and faith, begins to sing.  
...And then, only moments later, that same heart will break.

And let's be clear  
I don't think the moment Peter's heart breaks is when Jesus scolds him by saying, "Get behind me Satan!"  
I think in actuality it happens just a moment earlier.

For first Jesus asks the disciples, "But who do you say that I am?"  
And Peter answers him, "You are the Messiah."  
And then Jesus orders them not to tell anyone

And right there... that is the moment where I think we hear Peter's heart begin to break.  
But at first it's just a faint sound... a tremor...  
Peter confesses that YES... you are the Messiah...  
And Jesus says, "shh keep that to yourself."  
And Peter has to be thinking, "are you kidding me... this is the greatest news in the world and you don't want us to share it?!!"

And that's where I think the first crack happens...  
but quickly that little crack in Peter's heart begins to grow bigger...  
Kind of like when a rock hits your car's windshield and at first there's just a hairline crack but then you watch in horror as that little nick starts to grow across the window...

You see Jesus tells the disciples just what being the Messiah means...  
He tells them how he's going to be rejected, and suffer, and then....  
And here's where the break becomes unavoidable...  
Then Jesus says...  
And be killed.  
And in **that** moment I think Peter's heart fractures into a thousand shards of disappointment so loudly that it drowns out Jesus' final promise, "and be raised on the third day."

No wonder Peter tells him off.  
This sounds like blasphemy.  
The savior of the world, suffer?  
God's messiah, die?  
Are you crazy?

Peter, you see, wants and needs a strong God.  
he's looking for a descendant of mighty king David to come and overthrow the Roman rule and to restore Israel to it's rightful place among the nations.  
And he knows that Jesus has to be this kind of Messiah.  
After all, he's already brought relief, comfort, healing, and life.  
So what's all this talk about suffering and death?

Peter wants a strong God...and who can blame him.  
 Because really, are we any different?  
 When the crushing weight of life's heartbreaking moments bear down upon us,  
 when the voices of despair drown out all others,  
 when it's one disappointment after another,  
 don't we also want a strong God to avenge our hurts,  
 to right all wrongs,  
 and to put us back on top of things?

And this is where we get into the same trouble as Peter  
 This is exactly where we are setting our minds on human things and not divine things  
 For while in our humanity we believe that strength is everything  
 And might makes right  
 And the one who dies with the most toys wins.  
 What Jesus is yelling at Peter and us to realize is that  
 we have a God who employs an entirely different set of rules.  
 What Jesus is yelling at Peter to understand  
 Is how for God strength is not measured in terms of might but of love,  
 not in terms of victory but vulnerability,  
 not in possessions but in sacrifice,  
 not by glory but by the cross.

Jesus knows this; but Peter does not,  
 at least not yet.  
 For you see... this isn't the last time Peter's heart will break.  
 The next time comes much later in Mark's gospel,  
 when Peter will deny his Lord three times  
 And then it comes again when he will hide as his Messiah is beaten, nailed to a cross and dies...  
 alone.

But that will not end Peter's heartbreak  
 Because the next time Peter's heart breaks will be on the third day...  
 When Peter will hear that Jesus has been raised from the dead.  
 THEN... Peter's heart will be broken wide by a mercy he couldn't previously comprehend and  
 knows he doesn't deserve.  
 Then his heart will be cracked wide open to the possibility that mercy, grace, forgiveness, and  
 life are all possible through the holy and divine love of God.

Peter's heart breaks in today's reading because he doesn't get the God he wants.  
 It breaks again at the end of the story when he realizes that instead of getting the God he wants,  
 he gets the God he needs.  
 And so it is with all of us.  
 As we recognize that the God we worship comes not for the victorious  
 but for the vanquished  
 and seeks out not the mighty  
 but the down trodden.

Our God comes, to feed the hungry,  
to heal the lame,  
to free the bound and to bind up the broken-hearted.  
Our God comes, for us.

Peter couldn't believe that his newly confessed Messiah was "big enough" to embrace the humiliation and defeat, the suffering and ridicule, the torture and death that Jesus predicted were to come. Peter thought he had to protect Jesus from this future. Despite his confession of faith, Peter's concept of the Messiah, his understanding of God's power and purpose, is not "big enough."

But Peter's worries were ridiculous,  
Because with God's help, Jesus was big enough to shoulder the cross,  
big enough to bear the suffering of the world,  
big enough to endure scorn and rejection,  
big enough to accept the judgment of death.

Jesus the Christ, Jesus the Messiah, was big enough to endure all this,  
to take this ultimate risk because he knew first-hand a God who was big enough—  
big enough to break through hate with love,  
big enough to relieve the suffering forever,  
big enough to roll away the rock at the tomb's entrance,  
big enough to break the bonds of death itself  
and big enough to bring about the glory of the Resurrection.

May we this day, embrace the divine way of life.  
May we pray that our Lord Jesus would break open our hearts  
That we might perceive God's profound and overwhelming love for us all.  
May we declare this day that Jesus is the Messiah  
the bread of Life.  
The Living Water.  
The Rock of Salvation.  
The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.  
And may we live our lives following this Messiah  
Who heals our broken hearts,  
And calls us to help heal the broken hearts of the world.  
Amen

**May the peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen**

