

# Jesus & Peter - 11th April 2021

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Preacher: Matt Wallace

[ 0 : 00 ] Hey everyone, my name's Matt, the Vigorous St John's, and welcome to this latest instalment of our Sunday sessions.

First things first though, this week, and with the sad news of the death of His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, it's only right we pay our respects and offer up our prayers for Her Majesty the Queen and the Royal Family as they grieve his passing.

Ninety-nine years of age, some seventy-three years of marriage, with pretty much the whole of his adult life spent alongside and in support of the Queen in her royal duties.

And so, God, we thank you for the life of Prince Philip, and we're saddened by the news of his passing. Thank you for his service to our public life.

Thank you for his marriage to Queen Elizabeth and the strength and support he's been for her over so many years. We pray for the Royal Family and household, and for the Queen in particular at this time.

[ 1 : 05 ] May she know your comfort and find space to grieve within all of the protocols and procedures that now need attending to. We pray for our nation, and for those who will be responsible for organising the funeral in the midst of current restrictions.

May there be appropriate and safe ways for people to pay their respects and express their grief.

And yet, equally, God, we know that when national figureheads die, it can prompt all sorts of emotions for those across the country who are living with their own personal grief.

And so we ask for your peace, your comfort, to be with all those who will be struggling as a result of this sad news. Above all, though, thank you that you are the Lord of life and the conqueror of death. And so all these things we pray in the risen name of Jesus. Amen. Well, with this sad news aside, how you doing today?

For some of us, I know there'll be excitement about the prospect of some restrictions, relaxing, maybe a long overdue haircut, a return to the gym, a trip to the charity shop, or a pint in a pub garden.

[ 2 : 25 ] Heck, even all four of these in a day if we really fancy living the dream from tomorrow. For others of us, well, we'll be carrying understandable caution or hesitancy.

For others still, there'll be a deep sense of fatigue which will take a good while for us to overcome. I guess there's probably a mix of all of these things and more.

And just as April showers come in sudden bursts, so too feelings of relief or anxiety, tiredness or optimism will no doubt hit us in unexpected ways as the coming weeks unfold.

However we're doing, though, however tentative or tenacious we feel about what tomorrow and beyond will bring, we face the future knowing that behind, beside and before us is the God who simply delights in us.

The kind of heavenly parent who would keep a photo of us in their wallet or have our face on their phone screen, bursting with pride at what their son, their daughter have done this week.

[ 3 : 32 ] Indeed, in the book of Zephaniah in the Bible, we read this. It's a beautiful image.

The God who delights, who sings over us. And I love that phrase, he will quiet you by his love. Calming our fears, reassuring us that everything will be alright.

Not simply through platitudes or wishful thinking, but through love. And knowing that we are profoundly, deeply loved by God is a truth which we can live by.

And so God, thank you for being with us this far. And thank you that you promise never to leave us nor forsake us. It's been a long old slog, though, through this past year and more.

So little wonder, perhaps, if we're flagging now in all sorts of ways. And so may today, therefore, be a pit stop for us with you. Chance to change our tyres, to wipe our visor, to be filled with your fuel.

[ 4 : 48 ] Likewise, God, would you be especially imminent with those who need to go upper gear from tomorrow. Shop workers, hairdressers and beauticians, landlords, kitchen and bar staff, librarians, cleaners, council workers, support staff, health and law and order professionals whose workloads and pressure points will be affected by the changes coming in.

Would you give us all, therefore, an extra dose of patience, of understanding, of self-control in the way we deal with each other. But may this latest, limited unlocking also be a cause for joy and hope.

Indeed, may we know your joy and hope with all that we're going to consider now. And we ask that we might be in a better place in half an hour or so, having met with you today.

Thank you, God. Amen. All right. Well, if you caught up with our Little Easter Sunday offering last week, you'll know we were looking at the story of the Emmaus Road and how Jesus met with two particular disciples of his as they tried to get their heads round just what happened with rumours of Jesus' resurrection.

And as we saw last week, having eventually clocked that it was the risen Jesus who'd been walking with them the whole time, these two rushed back to Jerusalem from Emmaus to share their news with the other followers of Jesus.

[ 6 : 23 ] And yet there's one small but, I'd say, significant detail that occurs in how they're greeted by these other disciples, which it would be good to explore a bit more today.

So, we're told in Luke's Gospel of these two travelling companions that they got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven and those with them assembled together and saying, It's true, the Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.

Then the two told what had happened on the way and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread. Now, I must have read these words dozens of times over the years.

But it wasn't until last week that I noticed something I hadn't seen before. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.

You may be completely ahead of me on this one. But I'd never realised before that the risen Jesus had already made a special point of appearing to Simon.

[ 7 : 31 ] The disciple we know as Peter, after Jesus gave him a new nickname. I mean, there are a number of notable post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, which the Gospel accounts give us the details of.

So, we get Jesus seeing Mary Magdalene in the garden. As we've seen, Jesus hanging out with these two companions on the road to Emmaus. Jesus making a special point of showing the so-called Doubting Thomas his wounds.

Along with some more general appearances to the disciples as they gathered together. But, curiously, there's no detail given about this meeting between Jesus and Peter.

A meeting which must have taken place on Easter Sunday itself, before the Emmaus road travellers got back to Jerusalem on Easter Sunday evening. Indeed, the last specific thing we're told of Peter on that Easter day was that after the women had returned to the pretty incredulous disciples with news of the empty tomb.

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.

[ 8 : 46 ] And, again, he said, And so, sometime after this head-scratcher of a scenario for Peter, but before he returns to the other disciples, the risen Jesus appeared to him.

We're not told what this encounter involved. We're not told where it was. We're not told anything of what was said, how Peter responded, how long they spent together and so on.

No, nothing. The Gospels are silent on this. And yet, it's worth asking, why? Why would Jesus make a special point of appearing to Peter?

Why him before he appears to the rest of the disciples? Well, perhaps Jesus seeks Peter out because it seems the last time that they'd clocked eyes, literally, was on the night before Jesus died, when Peter denied three times that he even knew Jesus.

It's not surprising Peter wept bitterly.

[ 10 : 08 ] The weight of knowing he'd disowned Jesus in his hour of need must have been pretty crippling for him. And so maybe that's why Jesus sought Peter out so soon after his resurrection, to reassure him that there was no need to carry that guilt, that weight, that Jesus understood and that all was now well between them.

It's interesting, though, that in a later meeting on the shore of the Sea of Galilee between Jesus and Peter, Jesus asks him three times if he loves him.

A pretty clear way of enabling Peter to take back his three denials and get closure from whatever guilt he might have been carrying. Now, why might Jesus therefore have felt the need to give Peter special attention on both of these occasions?

Firstly, a private encounter on Easter Sunday, and then a much more public one on the beach sometime later. Well, I think this private slash public distinction is probably a helpful one.

You see, I wonder if in meeting Peter in this unreported, private way on Easter Sunday, Jesus is seeking to repair their personal friendship first, before, on this later occasion on the beach, Jesus reinstates Peter to his public role as chief disciple and the one who Jesus calls to feed and look after his other sheep.

[11:41] Yes, there'll be a pastoral role for Peter to play going forward, but before that commissioning, there's a personal bond between Jesus and Peter that needs repairing, that needs resurrecting, if you like.

Indeed, I also wonder, therefore, if this might give us similar permission to relate to Jesus in both a private and a public way. You see, as much as community life and sharing our faith journey with others is important, our personal encounters with Jesus and the way we speak with him when we're on our own matter too.

You know, in a social media world where privacy is invaded and there's a tendency to overshare, perhaps, you know, ranging from who we've gone for a walk with or what we've had for breakfast, right through to the mental health crisis we're having that day.

The fact that we know nothing about this first post-resurrection encounter between Peter and Jesus, well, I find that pretty liberating.

Not everything needs to be public. Not everything needs to be shared. Yes, social media interaction is often our way of trying to combat loneliness or disconnection because we need that dopamine hit of attention.

[13:08] You know, I get that, especially during lockdown. But just as Jesus said that we can go to our inner room and pray on our own, so too our inner dialogue with God is something we do well to nurture as well.

And the beauty of this is that speaking with God ticks the box for both internal and external processes, whichever we are.

You know, those of us who work things out in our heads on our own or those who get clarity from talking things through with others. Prayer can be both. I mean, I do both.

Sometimes talking out loud to God, especially when I'm out walking. And if you feel stupid doing that, you know, talking out loud to God, don't make a suggestion. Just pull out your phone and pretend you're on a call as no one will suspect you're actually praying, you know, talking to God.

That's one way for me. But more often, because I'm more of an internal processor, I tend to quietly think things through with God. Indeed, here's an overshare for you.

[14:13] I find I get most clarity from God when I'm in the shower. I don't do an early morning quiet time or anything like that. I'm so not a morning person. But when I'm in the shower first thing in the morning, you know, whatever brain stuff God has been helping me to process in my dreams, well, it's often in those first few minutes of the day that things tend to fall into place for me.

And so what about you? How honest do you feel you can be with God when it's just the two of you? In what way can you be honest with God? Jesus obviously sought Peter out because he knew he needed to meet with him in private.

They needed to say things which weren't for our ears to hear. You know, I wonder, particularly as lockdown lifts further this week, what might we need?

What might you need to get off your chest to God about this past year? What might you need to confess, to moan about, to dream dreams about with God, safe in the knowledge that it's between you two and no one else?

You know, we're feeling those things anyway. It can only be a good thing to invite God into our inner thoughts and see where God takes us.

[15:40] Now, having said all that about the importance of Peter and Jesus' private, personal relationship, we also know, actually, quite a lot about Peter's public persona as well.

So, for a start, we know his birth name was Simon. We know his dad was called John. So, he'd have been known as Simon, son of John. Simon Johnson, if you like.

We know that he flitted between being called Simon and Peter, a nickname meaning Rock, which Jesus gave him. So, he was really Simon the Rock Johnson.

Usually known as Peter, though, he had a brother called Andrew, and we know that Peter was married. Partly because he lived with his mother-in-law, but also because the Apostle Paul mentions Peter and his wife in his letter to the Corinthians.

So, in chapter 9 of that letter, Paul's talking about the merits of taking partners with them on various missionary trips, and he says this, Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Peter?

[16:53] So, Peter was evidently accompanied by his wife as they travelled around the Med, taking the good news of Jesus with them. It's quite a different picture, perhaps, than we might otherwise have assumed was the case.

What else? Well, Peter was a fisherman from a little village called Bethsaida on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, a village where his brother Andrew and another disciple of Jesus' Philip were from, and possibly James and John too, as we know Peter and Andrew were fishing business partners of theirs, and so, obviously, lived near to each other.

Having grown up in Bethsaida, though, Peter settled in nearby Capernaum, a town on the Sea of Galilee, where the adult Jesus also settled. Indeed, there's even a few hints that Jesus and Peter knew each other before Peter became a disciple of Jesus.

So, hearing Luke's Gospel, for example, Jesus has already been teaching and performing miracles in the town of Capernaum, when we're told this. Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon, who we know as Peter.

Now, Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her.

[18:17] Now, it's a relatively short, simple story, and Luke kind of just throws in that Jesus went to Simon's house, you know, Peter's house, as if we should already know who he is, but this is the first time he's mentioned in the Gospel, which suggests that Jesus was used to hanging out at Peter's place.

Indeed, it's only after this, in the next chapter, that we're told this. One day, as Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee, he got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Peter, and asked him to put out a little from the shore.

Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. Again, it's only a short little passage of narrative, but there seems to be a familiarity between Jesus and Peter.

You know, almost, oh, can I borrow your boat, please, mate? That kind of stuff. But it's only after borrowing his boat that Jesus then tells Peter to cast his nets out into the water for a catch, a miraculous catch, which ends up bringing in so many fish that Peter ends up falling at Jesus' feet in awe of him, to which Jesus replies, don't be afraid.

From now on, you will catch people. So they pulled the boats up on the shore, left everything, and followed him. Now, it's a decision to follow Jesus, which would appear, from Luke's Gospel at least, to be grounded in familiarity, to be grounded in friendship.

[19:50] Jesus has already been to Peter's house. He knows his family. He's healed his mother-in-law. He's comfortable enough with him to commandeer his boat, to tell him how to fish, and so on.

And so this miraculous catch seems to be the clincher for them both, the opportune time for Jesus to say, yes, I'm your friend, but there's more to me than that.

So come and follow me, and let's go on an adventure together. Now, why might this friendship be significant? Well, seems to me that if Jesus is drawn to Peter and sees something in him which he feels particularly able to work with, which is worth calling him to be his disciple, then I think we'd do well to consider what that might have been, because Peter's qualities may well be ones that we too can learn from.

I mean, for a start, just as we said the other week, whilst Jesus was himself renowned for asking questions, so too, it seems, was Peter. In fact, he asks more questions of Jesus than any other disciple.

So it's Peter who asks Jesus, explain the parable to us. It's Peter who tries to hedge his bets by asking Jesus, Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother when he sins against me?

[ 21 : 17 ] Up to seven times? It's Peter who challenges Jesus, saying, we've left everything to follow you. What then will there be for us?

It's Peter who wonders what will happen to another disciple, John, when he asks, Lord, what about him? Now, we might think some of those questions are a bit cheeky, a bit forward, perhaps. But Jesus seems to approve of Peter's questioning spirit, seems to have preferred someone speaking their mind than holding back on what they really thought.

Indeed, elsewhere, Peter certainly wears his heart on his sleeve, being the only one of the disciples who has the courage to step out the boat and try to walk on water when Jesus miraculously does that himself.

It's Peter who offers to set up some tents for Moses and Elijah when they appear with Jesus at what's known as his transfiguration. You know, setting up tents is such a ridiculously daft thing to suggest that it's actually quite endearing, quite sweet in some ways.

[ 22 : 29 ] Now, shall we set up a campsite, Jesus? On the other extreme, it's Peter who chops off the ear of the high priest's servant when the soldiers come to arrest Jesus, an ear which Jesus then feels obliged to heal there and then.

It's Peter who, as we saw on Maundy Thursday, blurts out his objections to Jesus washing his feet. But then, also more impressively, it's Peter who on another occasion pipes up when Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is, replying, you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

And so on and so on. Numerous times when Peter's impetuous, passionate nature comes to the fore. Now, he doesn't always get it right.

In fact, sometimes Peter gets things spectacularly wrong. But Jesus seems drawn to his passion, his questioning, his vibrancy. I can work with that, says Jesus.

Indeed, despite all of his flaws, it's Peter who, along with John, is trusted by Jesus to get his last supper ready. It's Peter, along with James and John, who Jesus brings up the mountain with him for his transfiguration.

[ 23 : 49 ] It's Peter who's included in the select bunch who are allowed to see Jesus raise Jairus' daughter from the dead. It's Peter who Jesus says is a rock and is the one to whom Jesus gives the metaphorical keys of his kingdom to.

You know, for a flawed, fiery fisherman, that is some CV. You know, ancient Jewish sources, aside from the Bible, describe people who came from Galilee like this.

They were more anxious for honour than for gain. Quick-tempered, impulsive, emotional, easily aroused by an appeal to adventure and loyal to the end.

Peter, this boy from Bethsaida, he was a typical Galilean, possessing all of those qualities. And yet perhaps that local reputation for loyalty was what caused Peter to cry such bitter tears when he realised that he'd been so disloyal to Jesus on the night before he died.

And yet, if this is what Galileans were like, if this is what Peter was like, it's no wonder Jesus liked him.

[ 25 : 08 ] It's no wonder he singled him out as one to whom he privately appeared after his resurrection. And it's no wonder it was Peter who Jesus called to take care of his followers after he'd returned to heaven.

Peter was a flawed but ultimately faithful friend of Jesus. And that to me is something and someone who we can take inspiration from.

You see, just as with Peter, Jesus knows us before he even calls us. And yet, even though he knows us, he still calls us.

He appreciates honest failure over hypocritical hype. He values character over competency. He prioritises passion over perfectionism.

You know, if Jesus admires and trusts someone like Peter, then I don't think about you, but I want to be more like Peter. I want to be someone who's not afraid to question Jesus in order to learn more, to be honest with him about how I'm really feeling, to be willing to put my foot in it because I'm just genuinely excited.

[ 26 : 21 ] I want to be someone who's up for stepping out of the boat at the risk of sinking, more so than simply staying on board because I'm afraid to take a chance with God.

Yes, if I'm like Peter, I won't always get things right, but I'd sooner try something and need to apologise afterwards than have never tried something at all.

you know, that's me. What about for you? What in your life might God just be calling you to be more like Peter in?

Or even if being like Peter as individuals seems out of character for us and a step too far at the moment, then we can all play our part in helping our common life to be more reflective of him, perhaps.

A church or a community who aren't afraid to take risks, to speak their mind, to challenge the system, to run to the empty tomb even though we know we've previously let Jesus down.

[ 27 : 21 ] Now, whether as individuals or as a collective, may we not lose that hope, that drive, that excitement, that love of wanting to go for it with God in spite of or even because of our rough edges.

Now, that to me is what the resurrection is all about. Believing that something better is possible because of Jesus. That's what the risen Jesus meeting with Peter was all about.

Restoring a friendship, yeah, but also because Jesus was excited about the possibilities for Peter which lay ahead. No matter who we are, no matter what we've done or what we haven't done, no matter how much we embarrass our kids or say stupid things or feel like a fraud and a failure, Jesus has been and continues to call us by name to follow him because as it says in 1 Samuel in the Bible, the Lord doesn't look at the things people look at.

People look at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart. I think it's fair to say Peter had a good heart, a heart which pleased Jesus and so may the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

all right. Oh, got quite worked up then. Let's take all of that though and offer ourselves to God with the help of a song which the St John's band have recently recorded for us, a song called Same Love and one whose words perhaps reflect some of the things we've been thinking about today.

[ 29 : 10 ] You choose the humble and raise them high You choose the weak and make them strong You heal our brokenness inside and give us life The same love that set the captives free The same love that opened eyes to see He's calling us all by name You are calling us all by name You take the faithless

One aside And speak the words You are mine You call the cynic and the proud Come to me now The same love that set the captives free The same love that opened eyes to see He's calling us all by name You are calling us all by name The same God that spread the heavens wide The same God that was crucified He's calling us all by name You are calling us all by name You're calling You're calling

You're calling They call very creation We should sing sales We have our You're calling us to the cross.

The same love that set the captives free. The same love that open eyes to see. He's calling us all by name.

You are calling us all by name. The same God that spread the heavens wide.

[ 32 : 39 ] The same God that was crucified. He's calling us all by name. You are calling us all by name.

You're calling. You're calling. You're calling us to the cross.

You're calling. You're calling. You're calling. You're calling us to the cross. You're calling us all by name.

You're calling us all by name. Top stuff. And our thanks to the band once again for all of their gifts and talents in leading our sung worship.

May we go knowing God's pleasure, God's peace and God's blessing on our lives. Indeed, by way of blessing.

[ 34 : 27 ] As Peter himself writes in his second letter in the Bible. Let's go with these words over us.

Dear friends, may grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

To him be glory, both now and forever. Amen.