

Rocky Road: Do You Love Me? - Sunday 10th March 2024

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[0 : 00] So, we've reached the end of our series on Peter, the end of our rocky road, well at least for us, but of course not the end of Peter's road.

For him, the best is yet to come. We're in chapter 21 of John's Gospel. Last week, Ruth, if you remember, dived into the disciples' encounter with Jesus on the shores of Lake Galilee with a naked Peter, no less, rushing to put his clothes on.

It's a bit more modest, this, isn't it, on the picture? I think he was naked. Rushing to put his clothes back on, which is interesting, before jumping off the boat to greet Jesus, who is very much alive.

And it's a humbling scene, isn't it? The resurrected Messiah, the Son of God, crouching down over a charcoal fire on the beach, grilling some fish, preparing some bread to make breakfast for his friends.

And it's with that same servant heart that he'd washed their feet not that long ago. And after breakfast, Jesus turns to and speaks to Peter.

[1 : 27] So let's watch the concluding clip from the Gospel of John, chapter 21, verses 15 to 25. When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

Yes, Lord, he said. You know that I love you. Jesus said, Feed my lambs. Again, Jesus said, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

He answered, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Jesus said, Take care of my sheep. The third time he said to him, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, Do you love me? He said, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you.

Jesus said, Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger, you dressed yourself and went where you wanted.

[2 : 42] But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.

Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, Follow me. Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them.

This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, Lord, who is going to betray you? When Peter saw him, he asked, Lord, what about him?

Jesus answered, If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me. Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die.

But Jesus did not say that he would not die. He only said, If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?

[4 : 01] This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well.

If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. Amen. Amen. Here's some questions for us.

No need to answer out loud, so don't shout anything out. Have you ever done anything that just makes you go red-faced with embarrassment, if ever or whenever you think about it?

Or even worse, when someone so helpfully reminds you? Have you ever said anything that you just wish, you just wish you could take back?

Or have you ever felt that terrible pang of guilt in your stomach when you've done or not done something that has let other people down?

[5 : 28] ever replayed those haunting what-ifs, if only? So just all of us then.

Yeah? We're in good company, aren't we? Because I'm pretty sure Peter thought that he had blown it big, big time with Jesus.

And you can sort of understand, can't you, that desire to return back to the familiar. Here he is, back fishing, yearning to simply do what he can do without having to think about it too much.

You know, eyes shut, maybe some time down or downtime to process the unbelievable events of those last few days. And I'm sure still fighting back the rising tide of remorse and shame he felt, looking back on that night of Jesus' arrest and trial, when Jesus had said to Peter, this very night before the rooster crows, you, you Peter, will disown me three times.

No, no, Lord, Peter says. Not me, Lord. Even if I have to die with you, I will never, ever disown you.

[7 : 07] It must have cut deep, mustn't it? And I guess for some of us, the regrets, the remorse, the disappointment we can live with can at times be unbearably painful.

Woulda, coulda, shoulda. It can haunt us, can't it? Hands up. Anyone who's seen this film, Manchester by the Sea?

Yeah, okay, some of you, not many. It's a few years old. It's 2016. One, at least one BAFTA. I think maybe a couple. Okay, it's not an easy film to watch.

Let's be honest. But Manchester by the Sea is a weighty exploration of grief and what happens when we allow anger and guilt and regret to just utterly overwhelm us.

And I guess it's a story about the complexity of self-forgiveness. And if you haven't seen it, and most of you obviously haven't, you might be thinking, well, that sounds like a fun night in, doesn't it?

[8 : 26] You know, you're not really selling this, Ian. Fair enough. Fair enough. And maybe you're thinking it is one to avoid. But oddly enough, okay, it's also a deeply life-affirming film with some moments of humour in there, even.

And I think well worth a watch. It's on Amazon Prime at the moment. And if you get a chance, I would encourage you to give it a go. Cassie Affleck, on the right there, or left, plays the lead role of Lee Chandler, a loner who works as a janitor in Boston.

And on the face of it, a man emotionally dead. Okay? But simmering just beneath the surface, a bubbling angst of rage with the world and with himself.

Lee comes back to his hometown after the sudden death of his brother, Joe. And he finds that he's been named as the legal guardian of his brother's teenage son, Patrick.

A responsibility that he neither wants or can cope with. And then through a series of flashbacks, we learn of the horrific tragedy that tore both his and his ex-wife's lives apart.

[9 : 58] And so I want to kind of, you know, I want to avoid spoilers here, really. I've probably told you too much already. Just in case, just in case you do want to watch this. But I would like to show you a short clip of when Lee runs into his ex-wife, Randy, played here by Michelle Williams, and how she desperately tries to reach out to him, to seek his forgiveness of how she treated him following the tragedy that devastated their lives.

And look, I'll be honest with you, it's a pretty gut-wrenching scene. Okay? But for me, it captures the heartache that she feels as she sees Lee, an empty shell of a man that she once knew, consumed by remorse and self-loathing, trapped by an unwillingness to forgive himself and a past that he can't let go of and that won't, it seems, let go of him.

I never went in for afterglow or candlelight on the mistletoe But now when you turn the light down low I'm beginning to see the light Hi.

Hi. Hey. Rachel, this is Lee. Hello, Lee, this is Rachel. Hi. And this is Dylan. You can't see him too good.

Hi, Dylan. Very handsome. Randy, you want me to get the car and pick you up? Yeah. Oh, that's okay. I gotta go. Actually, can we, um...

[11 : 47] Can we talk for a second? Sure. Okay. I'll just pull around. Just be a few minutes. Okay, thanks. Nice to meet you. Yeah, you too. Be right back. Um...

I don't have anything big to say. It's okay. Just...

I know you've been around and I... I thought... I've just been getting Patrick settled in. It seems like he's doing pretty good, huh? Considering. I think he is, yeah. I guess you don't know this, but I, uh...

I really kept in touch with Joe. No, I hear that. It's been kind of weird for me not seeing Patrick. Oh. Oh, okay. I didn't know. You could see him if you want.

Could we ever have lunch? You and us? You and me? Yeah. Um... Because I, uh...

[12 : 56] I said a lot of terrible things to you. No. But I... I know you never... Maybe you don't want to talk to me.

It's not that... Let me finish. However... My heart was broken. It's always going to be broken.

But I know yours is broken, too. I know... That I don't have to carry. I said things that...

I should fucking burn in hell for what I said to you. It was just... No, no, no, no, no. Randy, no. I'm just sorry. It's... I can't... I can't... I love you. I love you. Maybe I shouldn't say that.

No, you can say that. It's just... I'm sorry. I've got to go. We couldn't have lunch. I'm really sorry. I don't think so. Thank you for saying everything that you said. Just die.

[14 : 05] I'm not... I'm not... I'm not... Honey. And I'm... Honey. I want you to be happy. Honey, I see you walking around here. And I just want to tell you... I would want to talk to you, Randy.

Please. Please. I... I... I... I... Please. I'm... I'm... I'm... I'm trying to... You gotta... I don't know what... I don't want to torture you.

You're not... You're not torturing me. I just want to tell you... That I was wrong. No. No. No. You don't understand? There's nothing... There's nothing there. There's nothing there.

It's not true. It's not true, though. You don't understand. I don't know what this... I know you understand. I... I... I... I've gotta go.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Hmm. It's a tough watch.

[15 : 01] I'd love to say to you... It's a film with a happy ending. But this is an honest portrayal... Of the depths of grief... And remorse that Lee falls into.

I think it's fair to say... That it does have a hopeful ending. There is a way back for Lee. And we see that in the growing relationship...

With his nephew, Patrick. Love finds a way through. And there is hope of restoration back to life.

You know, what I think makes this film so powerful... Is the sheer... Sort of gritty realism. The honesty... With which it lifts up the lid... For us...

On this painful topic. And to help us to understand... What it can be like... When overwhelmed with... Grief and regret... Over what was lost...

[15 : 59] What could have been... Sends someone down a rabbit hole... And leaves an open wound... That's never really allowed... To heal... That traps those stuck...

In its perpetual cycle. Now, again, spoilers... But there is a scene in the film... When Lee is speaking with Patrick... And he just tearfully blurts out...

I can't beat it. I just can't beat it. I'm so sorry. And of course on his own... He can't. Lee is a work in progress.

And this is not... The end of his story. And Peter... On that beach... Is still a work in progress.

And this is by no means... The end of his story. Do you think... That... All guns blazing...

[17 : 04] Heart on his sleeve... Larger than life... Peter... Who was supposed to set an example... For all the other disciples... Who had denied Jesus... Three times... Who had made promises...

He hadn't kept... Do you think... That Jesus knew... That left unresolved... This could kind of... Spiral... Into a cycle of...

Regret... And remorse... That might see Peter... Retreating back... To his boat... Back to his old life... A place of familiarity... And comfort...

You know... Tempted... Tempted... To close the door... On those last three years... There's something... I think really... Really powerful...

About this... Interaction... Between Jesus... And Peter... At the Sea of Galilee... In the presence... Of all of the other disciples... And we usually talk about this...

[18 : 03] Don't we... As being the... The reinstatement... Or restoration... Of Peter... And in a public sense... I think that's true...

But we know... Matt and Ruth... Pointed out in their talks... That Peter... Had already met with Jesus... After his resurrection... And I'm guessing...

That's when... The tears... Flowed... That's when Jesus... Put his arm... Around Peter... And forgave him... And the process...

Of healing... And restoration... Began... But Peter... Also has... A public... Role...

A leadership role... Amongst the disciples... And in the coming... Early church... We see that unfold... Don't we... In the book of Acts... And so there had to be...

[18 : 58] A public... Restoration... Of Peter... And I think... I think... That in these verses... That's what we see... Here... Here is Jesus...

In the presence... Of... All the other disciples then... Sitting down with them... Over this... Charcoal... Fire... And he turns to Peter... And he says...

Simon... Son of Jonah... Do you truly... Love... Me... More than these... And the these... My guess... That he was talking about...

When he says this... Is he's looking... At the other disciples... Around the fire... Given everything... You've said Peter... All the bragging...

All the bigging yourself up... What do you say now? And of course... We can't know... But I picture Peter... His face sort of...

- [19 : 56] You know... Flushed... With embarrassment... Bright red... Now to hear... To hear this question... With all the others there... Listening in...
- On this... Conversation... You know... And Peter comes back... Maybe his mouth... A little dry... Yes Lord... Yes...
- You know... You know I love you... Feed my lambs... Now there's something... Going on here... With this word...
- Love... That both Jesus... And Peter use... Bear in mind... That this conversation... Is most likely... Aramaic... Okay... It's in Aramaic... But John uses...
- Greek... Of course... To capture... What is being said... So for Jesus... The word that's recorded... Here... For love... Is agape... Agape... And for Peter...
- [20 : 48] It's philio... Okay... Agape... As you probably know... Is usually understood... As divine... Or unconditional love... Maybe... The highest expression...
- Of love... And philio... Still a really deep love... But more an expression... Of brotherly love... And a number of... Biblical scholars... Of...
- And commentators... Think that they're... Probably... There's no real... Distinction... To be made here... Between... Between... These two words... In this particular context... But as I read this...
- I wondered... If John was... Trying to make... Some sort of point here... You know... To contrast... Between these two words... And not to make out... That Peter is somehow...
- Repeatedly... You know... Refusing to love Jesus... In an unconditional way... Because he doesn't use... The word agape... I really don't think... That's what's going on here...
- [21 : 44] It just doesn't fit... Peter's character... No... Rather... When Jesus says... Peter... Do you love me... With the highest love... And Peter says back...
- Lord... You know... I love you... Like a brother... This is a changed Peter... That Jesus is speaking to... He's not saying...
- Yeah Lord... I'll take that love... And I'll match it... And I'll raise it... This isn't Peter... Bragging about his... Grandiose love...
- And how his love is... So much better... So much greater... Than everybody else's love... No... This is a Peter... With a much humbler... Heart... He's been...
- On the rocky road... He's tripped up... More than once... And I think his response... To Jesus... Signals a new... Humility... In his heart...
- [22 : 39] There's a chink... I think there's a chink... In his armour... In his ego... And little by little... He's changing... But Jesus...
- Doesn't leave it there... He says a second... And then a third time... Simon... Son of Jonah... Do you love me?
- And we know... That on that third occasion... Peter... Was hurt... I'm sure he was thinking... Why? Why are you asking me this... Again and again...
- Lord... And in front of... Everyone else... It's interesting... On that third occasion... The word that Jesus... Uses...
- For love... Is not agape... It's philio... And so in effect... Jesus says... Peter... Do you really...
- [23 : 37] Love me... As a brother? That must have cut deep... That's got to hurt... Hasn't it? And all Peter can say is...
- Lord... Lord you know... You know all things... You know that I love you... There's something... There's something... Very very deep...

Going on here... Something very emotional... Between Jesus... And Peter... In the presence... Of all the other disciples... Jesus of course... Is very deliberately...

Doing this... Matching those three denials... With these three professions... Of love... He's not doing it... Because Peter was hard of hearing...

Or anything... Jesus does this three times... In the presence... Of all those other disciples... So that everybody... That was listening... Got it... Loud... And clear...

[24 : 33] Yeah... He denied me... Three times... But you've just heard it... From his lips... He's proclaimed... His love...

For me... Three times... It's a... It's a beautiful... Powerful... Public... Restoration... Of Peter...

It's as if Jesus... Sort of puts his arm around him... And says... Listen... Peter... You're my man... A mover... My shaker... And there's so much more to come...

And I... Choose... You... You... Peter... With all your flaws... With all your failings... To lead... And care... For my flock... And you want to know why?

Because the most... Important thing... Above... Everything else... Peter... Is that you love me... You see...

[25 : 31] Peter... Wore his heart... Didn't he? On his sleeves... What you saw... Was what you got... And he was a bundle... As we've been seeing... Over these last few weeks...

He was a bundle... Of contradictions... You bet... Just... Like... Us... And yeah... He often put his foot in it... And he got it wrong...

And he should have engaged... His brain... Before opening his mouth... Just... Like us... And no... He wasn't perfect... Just...

Like us... And did he still have a lot to learn? Yeah... Of course he did... Just... Like us... The only real qualification...

I think that Peter... Had going for him... Was that he loved... Loved... Jesus... And what Jesus desired... Most from Peter... And what he longs...

[26 : 25] And desires... Of course... Most from us... Is our love... Because everything else... Everything else... Our worship... Our obedience... Our passion... You know...

Our love to serve others... Our generosity... It all flows... Out... Of that... Now... I know... It's not in the text...

But in my mind... From verse 18... Peter and Jesus... Stand up... And start walking... Down the shore... With John...

Probably following... Just a little bit behind them... Like it showed in the clip... You know... Because he needed to overhear... The conversation... Didn't he? And Jesus is saying... There's something else...

I need to talk to you... About Peter... When you were younger... You had a lot of freedom... And you were impulsive... You still are... And you did whatever...

[27 : 19] You wanted to do... But you've got to know Peter... To follow me... There's a different thing for you... In your future... You're going to stretch out your hands...

And somebody's going to come and take you... And lead you somewhere... You don't want to go... And tradition of course... Is that Peter was crucified...

In Rome... Upside down... At Peter's request... But that isn't going to happen... For another 30 years... You know...

I wonder if... When they were... Sort of... Walking down that... Stretch of beach... If it was the same stretch... That they met on...

Three years ago... When Jesus made that invitation... To Peter... Follow me... It's as if Jesus... Gives him that invitation...

[28 : 13] All over again... Are you still in Peter? Now that you know... How the story... Ends... And just...

So that we know... That this is still... Peter... Okay... Still a work in progress... He turns around... To look at John... And he says...

What about him Lord? Hope you're not going to let him... Off the hook... Isn't that... Such a Peter thing to do? Such a human thing to do?

You know... If I'm making some sacrifices here... What about him? What about him? And if we're honest... Now isn't it something... We've thought... And feel about...

The others around us... What's it to you Peter? Jesus says... What's it to you? You just follow me... So how then...

[29 : 15] Might these verses speak... To us? Maybe for some of us... There are feelings of regret... Maybe... People or places...

That bring back painful memories... What ifs... If onlys... Things that we... We struggle... To forgive ourselves... Or others for... And like Lee...

In the film clip... That we watched... We can try and bury it... But often all that really does... Is hide it... Make it... You know... A lot worse...

Jesus knew... That Peter needed to receive... Both his forgiveness... And his love... And his acceptance... And as painful... That process of healing might be...

It was those first few... You know... Fragile steps... Back... That restored Peter... As he... Opened his heart... To Jesus again...

[30 : 13] I don't know... If you need to... Talk to someone... If you need to pray things through... Take that opportunity... This morning... And even if you find yourself...

Coming back... To this... And these things... You know... Healing and restoration... Is a process... It takes time... Letting go is...

Is never easy... But love will always find... A way through... Sometimes you just have to... To make that first move...

Or maybe you've been on the rocky road... And there's been a lot of... False starts... And you've had a few falls... Knocks and bumps... A lot of grazes...

On your knees... And cuts on your hand... I don't know... Maybe you sort of... You feel... Well the way things are... You haven't really got that much... You know... To offer...

[31 : 07] And yet... If we learn anything... From this encounter... Peter had with Jesus... It's this... It's those very scars...

Those very wounds... All the wrong turns... All the dead ends... That we bear the marks of... That uniquely... Equip us... To serve... What really matters...

Is whether we love him... If we're willing to... Lean in... With humility... To follow... And at the end of the day...

Isn't that what... Following Jesus... Is all about? Not perfection... Or never messing up... You know... Just... Just go... Sort of a bit further on... Into the book of Acts...

Take a look in that book... Peter will still struggle... To shake off... His old patterns of behaviour... And his insecurity... As he takes on... The responsibility of leading...

[32 : 03] The early church... But he keeps on going... So... May we be a people... Unafraid of our failures...

And our failings... May we quickly... Just recognise them... For what they are... Learn from them... Receive Jesus' forgiveness... Embrace his love...

So that we can just... Pick up... The baton... And keep on going... Amen... healthy... ..

Pulling...

Up...cause...