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“Enough”

John 1:35-42, 21:15-19

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Between birth and obituary, most of us hope to live a life worth living, a life that doesn't fall short. When all is said and done, we would like to have it said of us, either out of admiration or envy, “**Well done!**” Or better, “**Well lived!**”

Lives that strive to be enough are lived between what is symbolized by our two passages from John's Gospel, both about Simon. The first passage is about Simon receiving a name and the second is about facing a death. Simon strives to live up to a nickname given him by Jesus, the one he most wants to please. The second passage takes place after Jesus has died with Simon thinking his own life will be forever defined by Jesus' death....., which it will, but not in the way Simon thinks.

Listen for the Word of God as I read passages from the beginning and end of John's Gospel.

John 1:35-43:

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, “**Look, here is the Lamb of God!**” ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “**What are you looking for?**” They said to him, “**Rabbi**” (which translated means Teacher), “**where are you staying?**” ³⁹ He said to them, “**Come and see.**” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “**We have found the Messiah**”



(which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

John 21:13-19

¹⁵ When they had 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.” ¹⁶ 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.” ¹⁷ He 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. ¹⁸ Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” ¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

A scene from *The Big Bang Theory*: Howard Wolowitz, scheduled to fly into space, is on a Zoom call with an experienced astronaut, Mike Massimino. Mike’s nickname is “Mass.” Howard wonders what his nickname will be. Every astronaut gets a nickname, and he hopes his will be something cool like, “Rocketman,” which is also his chosen ringtone. While Howard talks to Mass, his mother yells with her piercing voice: “Howard, your fruit loops are getting soggy!” Howard apologizes for the interruption to Mass, who answers with a smile, “No problem, Fruitloops.”

You can see in Howard’s face that he’s done for. He knows that from this day forward he’ll have to live with the name just given him: Fruitloops.

So often, there is something whimsical in a nickname. Today is the first Sunday of the NFL regular season, so my mind has gone to sports. Think of all the whimsical nicknames.

There is

Wilt the Stilt
and Clyde the Glide

There is

Primetime
Goose
Catfish
Magic
Sweetness
and Tiger

There is

The Juice
The Dream
The Jet
The Mailman
The Rocket



The Golden Bear
and The Round Mound of Rebound

There is

Broadway Joe and Shoeless Joe

Iron Mike

Iceman Gervin

Pistol Pete

Charlie Hustle

Too Tall Jones

And Flo Jo

(about time a woman made the
List)

There is

Dr. J

Mr. October

and His Airness

I've begun signing emails with G.E.O. so people can trust that the email is legit, and then I started signing letters that way because it takes less time. Now a few of you are calling me Geo. Cut it out.

Is Jesus whimsical when he gives Simon his nickname, "Chephas, "which is translated "Peter," which means "Rock?" We place Jesus in such high esteem, it is odd to think of Jesus having a teasing side. Maybe the nickname he gives Simon is a heavy and meaningful moment, as if Jesus is answering a baptism question like, "By what name do you declare this man's identity before God?" Maybe this nickname is as weightily considered as the nickname, "Israel," given to Jacob, a name which means "Wrestles with God."

Come to think of it, that sounds a bit whimsical as well. So, maybe it is not completely out of the realm of possibility that Jesus, knowing Simon already (which I think he does), knowing something of his personality, is playful in calling him "Rocky." "Hey, I need a follower who wants to be a leader. I know you Simon. You can't be in a group without taking charge. I'm calling you Rocky. We're going to build a church on people like you."

I don't know. But, whether Jesus is serious or not, Simon is certainly serious about his nickname. From that moment on, Simon seems determined to prove to Jesus, his rabbi and leader; and, maybe more to the point, prove to himself, that he is worthy of the name Jesus has given him. He wants to show he can be counted on, that he is a pillar of strength, or maybe part of a foundation on which a community will be built.

Over twenty years ago, a group from this church went to Israel. God bless the memory of Lil Brown who led the trip. She herself was a great leader. Truly a remarkable person. And Lil was a Rock-like leader. When we were near the Dead Sea, she wanted to see beauty in a botanical garden rather than feeling dirty on a swim in the Dead Sea so she announced we were going to skip



the sea and see the flowers. I was crushed, because I wanted to experience what it is like, not to float, but to lie on top of water. But I was the preacher who had to act mature and support our lay leader, so I didn't say anything. My sainted mother, however, who was also on the trip and knew how much I wanted to go, declared, "I didn't fly all the way to Israel not to swim in the Dead Sea!"

Lil relented a bit and we got to spend just a few minutes discovering what it is like to lie back or lie on the side, sit down or stand up- in other words, get in whatever sinkable position we want and still not come close to going underwater. Along with the oily feel of the water so saturated with salt and other chemicals, it was a new sensation. Even though she let us stay in the water only 15 minutes, I left thinking I experienced everything unique about the Dead Sea.

I was wrong. This past March, I was able to go back to Israel with Ed McLeod being the leader—a guy who likes to play in oily—feeling water as much as I do—and spend over an hour in the Dead Sea. From the previous trip, I remembered how jagged the rock was at the bottom so I brought shoes so I wouldn't look so wimpy gingerly taking steps. Someone told me to reach down and grab the rock beneath my feet and try to break it. I did and I was shocked to discover that the rock crumbled in my hand. It wasn't rock after all, but solidified salt and chemicals.

That is the kind of "rock" Peter turns out to be. He is loyal, following Jesus till the end, and he is a leader, often being the first to speak or take action. One of his shining moments is when, after feeding the 5000, the freshly fed crowd turn their backs on Jesus and leaves him because Jesus says something they think is gross about their needing to eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood. After the crowd leaves, Jesus turns to the twelve and asks, "Do you also wish to go away?"

It is Peter who says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

But there are other moments when Peter, trying to prove that he is enough, that he is worthy of the nickname, goes too far. You can't find better examples than what you find happening in one night.

One Bravada: Before Jesus has his last meal with his disciples, he kneels before them to wash their feet. Peter goes too far. He refuses to have his feet washed, basically letting Jesus know that being a servant is not the way to lead. Jesus insists and Peter relents.

Two Bravada: Jesus then tells the disciples exactly what is going to happen that night, that one of them will betray him, that he will be arrested, and eventually be killed. Peter wants to prove he is enough and, again, goes too far. Peter declares that there is no way this is going to happen. He won't let it happen. "Really," Jesus says. "Before the cock crows, you'll have denied knowing me three times."

Ouch.

Then *Three Bravada:* Peter is determined to prove Jesus wrong and show that he is enough. When the arresting party comes, Peter takes out his knife and attacks. He cuts off the ear of a member of the arresting party. Before a melee breaks out, Jesus intervenes. He tells Peter, "This is not the way," and he heals the man's ear.

Seeing Jesus led away, there is no bravado left. The Rock crumbles. Peter can't help but make his way into the courtyard outside the room where Jesus is being interrogated. Peter sits in a circle around a charcoal fire. Three times Peter had shown his bravado, and now three times he



shows how crumpled the rock now is. Three times he is asked if he is not one of Jesus' followers. One of those who asks is a relative of the man whose ear he severed. Three times Peter denies knowing him, and then the cock crows. Others just hear a rooster, but Peter hears the translation: "You are not enough."

Some might suggest that Peter's problem is that he doesn't have enough faith, that he is *not religious enough*. But maybe his problem is that he is too religious. I know that sounds odd, so let me explain. Being religious, as I am thinking about it, is having a deep devotion to someone or something that gives you your identity, fuels how to live. We're all wired that way. You don't have to be a Christian, and you don't have to believe in God, to have a devotion to something that defines what you think makes your life worth living and sets standards for what must be done for you to be enough. (The word for "being enough" in the church world is "righteous.") You can even be a Christian and be like me: get sucked into believing that there is some type of righteousness that can be achieved where God will say: "You did it. Well done good and faithful servant, come into the reward that is yours."

And so, one tries to be devout and keep all the rules and another tries to be correct and take all the right stands. Both are anxious because both know, deep down, that it is not enough... that they are not enough.

Peter spent his entire time following Jesus

- trying to prove he belonged,
- trying to prove he was enough,
- trying to be the Rock that he was called.

And what he can't hear, is that it's not possible for him to be enough, he can't do it on his own. Peter will never be enough, because we always can do better—we always can be better—if we hope to be the rock Jesus always can count on. Right after Jesus told Peter he would deny him three times, he told Peter this: "But don't be troubled. What I have to do, I have to do alone. Where I am going, you cannot come. But I am going to prepare a place for you, and I will return and take you where you need to go. I will take you into God's home with many rooms, with there being room even for someone who will falter and deny me." Jesus is telling Peter, "I can do for you what you cannot do for yourself."

What can you and I do in order to be worthy? What can we do to prove to God and to ourselves that we are enough to be loved and accepted? I hope you know the answer to that question because we talk about it all the time in church. You cannot come to worship at Second Presbyterian Church without hearing multiple times from this pulpit that the answer is, "Nothing." We are saved solely by the grace of God. That God loves us is what makes us enough.

The only thing that makes this answer extraordinary is that church is one of the precious few places in our culture where you will hear it. We will

- never be good enough in athletics or the arts,
- never popular enough at school or in the community,



- never right enough when it comes to taking stands,
- never rich enough when it comes to winning the game of having the most toys,
- never powerful enough when it comes to having your way,
- never good enough when it comes to doing what is right,
- never smart enough when it comes to being wise,
- never healthy enough when it comes to exercise and diet,
- never loving enough when it comes to the people you most want to love.

We always will fall short and we always will be in a constant state of striving or of stressing in trying to be enough.

Even in many Christian churches, despite our talking about grace, the truth of what I said can get lost.

- When faith becomes a self-improvement scheme,
 - we will never improve enough.
- When faith becomes about believing,
 - we will never get it all right,
- When faith becomes a way to behave,
 - we will never be good enough.
- When faith becomes a social justice movement,
 - we will never do enough.
- When faith becomes the right stands to take,
 - we will never take all the stands we should take, and we will never back them up enough.

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying our Christian faith cannot lead to changed lives and better behavior. It can. (Even though sometimes physical or mental illness, or grinding conditions in life, get in the way of our projects of self-improvement or making the world a better place. Sometimes we get too mad or get caught up in some cause that makes us demonize others). Our faith can positively affect our lives and behavior, but the point is that our efforts to become good enough have nothing to do with getting ourselves saved. I've talked to a number of people at the end of their lives

- who were afraid to live because they were afraid to fail,
- and then were afraid to die because they were afraid they did not do enough.

The only thing I have been able to say to them that has had any impact is to say over and over again something of what Jesus said three times to Peter so he can hear it.

Jesus is cooking breakfast on a charcoal fire. Simon Peter is standing in the circle around it. Jesus asks him, “**Simon**, (notice that Jesus doesn't use the nickname but calls him by the name his mama and daddy gave him). **Simon, John's son, do you love me more than these?**” I hear Jesus



teasing again, poking at Simon because Simon knows that right now he is a “Less Than Disciple,” not a “More Than Disciple.” The charcoal fire reminds him of that, for the last charcoal fire he stood beside was when he denied knowing Jesus three times.

“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” You can imagine Simon studying his sandals and about to apologize and insist he will do better next time, but Jesus doesn’t give him a chance. He says, “Feed my Sheep.” And then he asks a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Again, you can imagine Simon wanting to explain that, “Yes, I know I failed you, Jesus, but you’ve got to believe me, I do love you.” But all he says is, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus knows what Simon has done, and he knows Simon will fall short again, but he says again, “Feed my sheep.”

And then the third time to match the third betrayal, Jesus asks, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Now the text tells us how flustered and frustrated Simon is. He says, “You see right through me. You know everything that is wrong with me and every way that I’ve failed. You know me, so you have to know I love you.” And Jesus says the third time, “Then feed my sheep.”

I can hear Jesus saying to Simon, you were never really supposed to be the Rock. God’s love is the rock. That is what cannot be broken. So, knowing you messed up, and knowing you’re still going to fall short (and Peter does mess up again, just read the book of Acts)—knowing you will not on your own be enough, go ahead and live your life. Feed my sheep as best you can. At the end, it will be enough. Not what you did. God’s love will be enough.

