

Service 23 Aug 26

Hymns

186 Great is thy faithfulness

158 Glorious things of thee are spoken

380 O Lord my God

467 Tell out my soul.

Sermon

I love Peter. He's such a big bouncy puppy of a man, always anxious to please even though he usually gets it wrong. Think about Jesus suggesting he will deny Jesus three times before the cock crows when Jesus is arrested. Oh no I won't, declares Peter. And of course he does.

Think about when the disciples see Jesus walking towards them on the choppy sea. Peter wants to go and meet him by walking on the water. Yet part way through, his faith deserts him and he sinks. And again: on the mountain when Jesus is seen with Moses and Elijah and is transfigured.

Peter is amazed, and wants to leap in to build tabernacles for the three. He gets short shrift. Or when Jesus is telling them that he is going to be killed. Peter takes him on one side and says no, no. We'll never let that happen! Jesus calls him Satan for tempting him not to go through with his mission. Poor Peter. Always so willing, but always knocked back. Jesus always seems to be aggravated by him, to be telling him off, but Peter never gives up, never gets sulky, never answers back. He just accepts it, bounces back and continues to follow Jesus.

But in this passage, we see something very different. Puppy Peter has bounced up once again. Jesus has asked the disciples who they think he is. Not what others think he is, but who *they* think he is. Peter replies, almost unconsciously: You are the Son of God. He knows instinctively now exactly who Jesus is. He is the disciple who answers Jesus immediately with the right answer. But this time, rather than being knocked back by Jesus, Jesus praises him,

and makes a huge promise about his future. Perhaps he feels that at long last, Peter has started to understand what Jesus has been teaching them. Yet right from the start, Jesus has been calling this fisherman, whose name is Simon, Peter. 'Peter' from the Greek and Latin for 'rock'. From the very beginning Peter has been marked out for a special role. Maybe that is why Jesus is a bit harder on him than on the others, though James and John get their comeuppance from him too, when their mother asks for special places for them.

Now we begin to see why Jesus calls him 'rock': he is going to be the rock on which the entire church worldwide is founded. Jesus isn't talking about some twee little church building that will be built on firm foundations: he's talking about an organisation with millions of members – in fact, billions if you count all the people that have been members in the past. Not only that, but the organisation that Peter is to be in charge of will be invincible, even to the Devil. Jesus is about to

entrust the keys of heaven to Peter. And give him so much power that whatever he says is to happen to God's people, will happen. Can you imagine what an honour, what an enormous thing this would be to a fisherman? To someone who lived a contented life working at catching fish to feed others? Someone who had no education? Who had no training in how to be a leader? Suddenly he is given this huge responsibility. I would have loved to have been there to see his face when Jesus says this to him. Did he look bemused? Did he think Jesus was talking tosh? Did he glow with pride? Did he even understand what Jesus was really giving him? Well, he's Peter. Just Peter. How do you think he responded?

After all, Peter is just like us. He desperately wants to be with Jesus, to be his friend. He doesn't care about where or how: he just wants to knock around with Jesus. And because he's very human, he keeps putting his size 10s in it. He tries too hard, rather than just being Peter. How often

do we make the same mistakes? And what does Jesus do when Peter makes mistakes? A gentle slap on the wrist. A sigh of exasperation. And then, the keys of the kingdom. The same when we do daft things, when we bounce around being too keen and getting it wrong. What do we get? A bit of a 'tut'; a reminder of who we are and what Jesus wants of us. Does he stop loving us? Absolutely not. Never. He invites us to be a worker for him. He gives us privileges – and makes sure we don't abuse them. He wants us to be us – just us. Remember that when you don't feel good enough. Like Peter, you most certainly are.