

“And Peter took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him”

The more time I spend reflecting on my life, and all the mistakes I've made and the more honest I am with myself, the more I realize that the things I say and do, and my reactions to particular situations, as much as I hate to admit it, very often, usually actually, has a whole lot more to do with me than the other person in the situation. I say this because I think that's true for Peter in today's Gospel lesson also. I am thinking that Peter's reaction to Jesus says a lot more about Peter than it does about Jesus, and I reckon that Peter's reaction says something to us as well.

It's not too difficult to see and understand what's going on with Peter. I think he's scared. I think he feels overwhelmed by and unprepared for what's coming. And you know as well as I do that life sometimes does that to us. I can easily imagine Peter thinking to himself, “You know, when I signed up to this ‘fish for people’ thing, this great suffering, rejection, death; that's not what I signed up. That was never in my plan.” Miracles... yes, suffering...let me check my calendar... I can't remember if I put suffering on my calendar this week... no... it doesn't look like I signed up for suffering this week...

And friends, I figure that you know as well as I that sometimes life brings us stuff we didn't sign up for. It takes us places we never planned or wanted to go. I suspect Peter is struggling with his faith, even after the profound statement he made, trying to make sense of what he really believes, wondering if he has what it takes to meet the demands of faith in this moment. And you know as well as I that sometimes life sets those questions before us.

I know what that's like, don't you? We've stood next to Peter, haven't we? We've known times in our lives when we felt unprepared for what we were facing. We looked down the road at what was coming and we didn't like what we saw. We wanted to cry out, "No. This isn't happening. This cannot be. This must not be." Haven't there been times when you felt scared, unprepared for, or overwhelmed by life? Haven't there been times when you just didn't want to face what life was bringing you? Haven't there been times when you just didn't know whether your faith was up to the demands of life? Love my enemy? Forgive not once, not seven times, but seventy times seven? Turn the other cheek when the first one is still red and stinging?

Imagine taking a snapshot of your life in that moment. What would it show? Would you like what you see? Is that a picture you want to frame and keep or would just as soon throw it away? I'm often not at my best at those times, and I don't like those pictures of me or my life. And I'll bet you don't either. They are the kind of pictures that we would delete from the album of our life if we could. We certainly wouldn't want anyone else to see them. My guess is that Peter would opt for a re-take.

And yet, we all have those kinds of pictures in our lives. We've all looked at bad pictures of ourselves, pictures that show us to be less than or other than we know ourselves to be or want to be.

There is, however, more to us than that one picture can show. I suspect we know that; we just don't live it. We're too quick to see that one picture, that one snapshot in time, as descriptive and representative of who we are and what our life is like. We take that one photograph of ourselves and say, "This is me. This is my life. This is all there will ever be." We hold that picture as a final judgment or description of ourselves. And sometimes we take those kinds of photographs and hold them up to another and say, "Look at what you did. This is who you are. This is how I will always see you."

But can a single snapshot really tell the whole story? No. Life is more like a movie: an ongoing story that is active, dynamic, changing, and unpredictable, than it is a snapshot in time. There is more to Peter than the snapshot we are given in today's Gospel, and there's more to you and me than those snapshots we want to rip out of our life's album. Every snapshot exists within a larger story. That's true for Peter, and it's true for you and me.

Today's Gospel is just one snapshot of Peter. Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. Jesus turns and rebukes Peter and calls him Satan. "You are the deceiver. You are the adversary. You are the tempter. You are out of line, Peter. Get behind me." Do you really believe that one picture is all there is to Peter? I don't. It's only four verses earlier that Peter is the confessor, the one who recognizes Jesus. "You are the Messiah." Those are two pictures of the same man taken from different angles.

Remember the day Peter stepped out of the boat full of faith and walked on water, the same water on which Jesus walked? That's a picture worth framing and hanging on the wall. But if you took another picture just a few minutes later you would see Peter sinking, scared, crying out for help, and Jesus saying, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Or how about the picture of Peter as the rock on which Jesus will build the church? Set that one next to the picture of the cock crowing Peter's three denials of Jesus.

I'm sure Peter would like to lose that snapshot of him sleeping in the Garden of Gethsemane while Jesus prayed and being awakened by Jesus' question, "So could you not stay awake with me one hour?" Compare that picture to the one of Jesus saying to Peter, "Feed my lambs.... Tend my sheep.... Feed my sheep".

It's not just Peter who has conflicting or contradictory pictures in his life. Remember the man who brings to Jesus his demon-possessed child, and Jesus says tells him that all things are possible for the one who believes? The man declares, "Lord, I believe." It's a picture of faith. But, the picture changes. "Help my unbelief," the man says next. And who among us hasn't seen those two pictures in our life?

What about Mary, the mother of Jesus? "How can this be?" she asks when the angel announces her pregnancy. And then just a bit later she says, "Let it be with me according to your word."

Jesus also experienced the conflicting snapshots of life. Compare two snapshots of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Father, remove this cup from me,” and “Not what I want, but what you want.” Look at the different snapshots of Jesus on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” and “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”.

And it’s not just them. It’s us too. We all have those contradictory pictures in our life. Each one of us could go back and pick out the bad picture days of our life. I can’t count the number of times people have come to me and described their life as a single picture. They describe themselves or their life through a particular event, which is fine, but then they so often make the leap that that description is all they are, and all their life will ever be. They allow that one snapshot in time to stand as a final judgment.

What if we took those snapshots of life for what they really are? What if we looked at them as simply one moment in time, a single still frame that is part of our life’s movie? What if that one picture isn’t a final judgment but simply information about what is happening in us: information about our fear, our wounds, our hopes, our needs, our struggles. What if it’s just a picture of us at a particular time and place trying to do the best we could with what we had?

And it may not be our best picture. It may look as if we blew it, like we didn't try very hard, or that we weren't the person we wanted to be, but I think most of us do the best we can with what we have in those moments. Sometimes life really is difficult, overwhelming, and scary. Sometimes faith really does push us to our limits. Sometimes life really does give us what we never asked for or wanted.

What if there is always more to that picture than what we often see? It would be so easy to look at the snapshot of Peter in today's Gospel ([Mark 8:31-38](#)) and say that he just blew it. He was not a good disciple. He was not faithful. He was out of line when he rebuked Jesus. He got called out by Jesus. That's probably not a picture Peter wants to carry around and show others.

What if Jesus' rebuke of Peter, the sting of being called Satan, is really just Jesus saying, "Peter, that's not who you are. I know you. You are more than what you have become in this moment. Wake up. Claim your belovedness. Trust my calling of you. Return to yourself."

Every picture has more than one interpretation. We can look at those snapshots of our life and let them bind us to the past, and forever label and judge us or another. Or we can look at them and say, “Wow, that was a terrible picture day. That’s really not me, and it’s not who I want to be,” and we let those pictures call us back to ourselves, back to our center, back to our original beauty. We let that bad picture call us into a new life and a new way of being.

That’s what Jesus is doing with Peter today and it’s what he is continually doing with us. Jesus is continually calling us back to ourselves, letting us see ourselves through his eyes, reminding us of who we truly are and who we can become.

Most of the time we look at those pictures, and we know we’ve stepped outside ourselves, we’ve betrayed ourselves, we’ve violated our own integrity. We feel shame, disappointment, or regret. Those are not about punishment or judgment. They reveal that we have touched the darkness within ourselves, but they are not our permanent condition. They are the pointers to something else, reminders that there is more than can be shown in a single photograph.

What do you see when you look through the album of your life? What are the snapshots of your life today that bind you to the past? What pictures have you let define who you, your value, and your worth? Which pictures do you want to delete and never see again? What are your bad picture days that you try to hide from yourself and others?

They are the pictures that tell our secrets and display our wounds. They keep us up at night, reliving that moment, desperately trying to make it different. They are the ones that we just can't get out of our mind, the memories that haunt us. Have you ever asked forgiveness for something and then asked again, and again, and again? That's probably about a bad picture day.

As much as we might like to hide, delete, or photoshop those pictures, they have some value for us. The very things that haunt us can become our teacher. The very things that we don't want to hear about ourselves can become a calling into a new life. The very things we do not want to see about our life can show us a different way of being.

What are the bad picture days of your life? What are you looking at and holding on to today as the definitive picture of you and your life? Whatever those pictures might be, regardless of what they might show, they always exist in a larger story. No one would buy a ticket to the movie, watch only a single still frame, and claim to have seen and understood the movie. Why would we do that to ourselves or one another?

That's certainly not what Jesus does to Peter. The rock that sank in the waters of doubt is also the foundation of the church. The denier of Jesus is also the feeder of Jesus' sheep. Jesus sees more than the snapshot of the moment. And if that's true for Peter it's also true for us.

Maybe we should gather up those photographs we want to throw away and look at them one more time, this time with the eyes of Jesus, and look for what we've not seen before: the beauty hidden within disfigurement, the light that shines in the darkness, the healing that comes from great suffering, the belonging that overcomes rejection, the life that arises from death, the picture of hope that stands amidst a landscape of despair.