

Remember the gospel story from last week? Simon boldly declared Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Simon's confession changes him. Jesus acknowledges this transformation by giving him a new name, Peter, the rock! Some of you may have thought Duane Johnson is the Rock, but he is not the original. Simon Peter is the original The Rock! Jesus declared in last week's story that Peter the Rock is the first of the disciples with the responsibility to serve the Church so that none of the gifts of the Church will be lost. Peter the Rock is to keep the Church true to its mission, to witness to Christ Jesus.

Peter was held up as an example by his leader and Lord, Jesus. When we read the gospel text for today, we are stopped by what looks like a harsh criticism of Peter. How could Peter be hailed as the first among disciples one day and rebuked the next? What if instead of being rebuked, he was invited to once again follow Jesus by watching and learning? After all, Jesus did not say, "Get lost," but rather, "Go behind me."

The door of salvation history has swung open to a new day, but we, like Peter, have difficulty navigating through the day. We, like Peter, struggle to understand the new landscape of the day. The door of salvation history has swung open with the birth of Jesus and then the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Like Peter before us, it will take the transformation of our hearts to see Jesus for who he is and follow him in humble obedience. Jesus is the Holy Disruption in the world that has opened the way of the kingdom of heaven.

Disruptions are times when the whole world stops and space is created to re-evaluate life before moving forward. A disruption is more than a pause in time. New direction is often the result. The incarnation of Jesus was the first part of a two pronged disruption. The second part of the disruption culminated in the resurrection of Christ. The holy disruption of Jesus was a disruption of time. You could say the world stopped its previous rhythms when Jesus was born. His life and ministry became an exercise in the re-creation of time. The fullness of the holy disruption occurred in the suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ Jesus. Stop. Re-evaluate. Move forward.

I am a fan of the Woman's National Basketball Association in general and a fan of the Minnesota Lynx in particular. In the winter of 2019 I was surprised to hear that one of the Lynx's star players, Maya Moore, was sitting out the 2019 season

in the prime of her career. Maya Moore is a successful athlete consistently making her teams champions led by her play. She is a popular player gathering children at center court at the end of each home game for a brief dance party. She is a person who often has talked about the importance of living a life of faith.

In early 2019 she announced she would disrupt her career in order to focus on overturning the wrongful conviction of a Missouri man. Moore, having grown up in Jefferson County, Missouri, became aware of the case of Jeremy Irons while she attended college. Now about 10 years later there was opportunity to bring evidence to light that could free Irons. In 1997 Jeremy Irons was wrongfully convicted for a burglary and nonfatal shooting of a St. Louis homeowner. At the time Irons was 16 years old. He had been given a 50 year sentence.

Moore stopped her life, evaluated what it would take to work to free Irons, and took a new direction in her life to secure Irons release. In early 2020 she announced she would again sit out another season to see the release through to the end. On July 1st, Jeremy Irons was released from prison, his sentence overturned. Moore was there to greet him wearing a t-shirt which said, "Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly."

Jesus calls us into the world which is being re-created by his grace and mercy when he says, "If any want to become my followers let them deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Suffering is part of the world. Sometimes you may choose a path of suffering, especially for the sake of another's freedom, sometimes you might embrace it, while other times suffering is to be resisted, especially because it oppresses. No matter the kind of suffering you experience, you can be sure that Jesus is present with you. God in Jesus came amongst us to be with us.

The chief character of God is to reach out in love. I think God always holds out hope that the human response to God's love will be love in return. God in Jesus came amongst us, opening up a new way of being in the world, embodying a vital message of love and acceptance. Yet Jesus knew that humanity would likely reject the message and seek to destroy the messenger. The cross is the rejection of God in Jesus but also part of the holy disruption which causes the world to stop

and think, even though it will not move forward until Jesus is raised from the dead.

The cross happens, not so much as a part of an overall plan, but as the outcome of what God is doing in re-creating time and opening up salvation. Jesus didn't so much choose the cross as trust in God to work through the extreme circumstances of the cross for the sake of the world God loves so much.

The cross isn't something we choose as much as it is something which finds us as we seek to live in faithful response to the love and mercy we have received from God. Sometimes we find it redeeming – the sacrifices we make for family and friends that builds us both up, like being a fountain of life for all who gather here. It is like Maya Moore who gave up her individual career for the sake of the freedom of another, and then found joy in it.

Sometimes it is difficult to tell if there is anything good at all in the suffering we see and experience because the outcomes we hope for take too much time, at times beyond one's lifetime. Yet Christ identifies with all of our suffering, the suffering of all creation, took it all on himself in his passion and death, and promises to meet us in ours.

Christ Jesus boldly invites Peter to go behind him, to follow him and be shaped by the life that he leads him into. At the end of the gospel of Matthew Jesus will charge Peter and all the disciples, having learned how to be bold, to go out to all peoples and gather them in, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And proclaim to those they gather that Christ Jesus is with them always, in life, in suffering, in the disruptions, and in the unfolding future of God.

Peter lived in the real time of Jesus' disruption and would soon learn how disruption would shape his life. Through it all Jesus was with him, leading him, guiding him, loving him, forgiving him, and redeeming him.

Thinking matters through to the point of acting in the manner of the love of God in Jesus Christ is the goal. The love of God in Jesus Christ is always directed outward to the neighbor. This story of Peter reminds us that faithful following of Jesus is not a smooth or easy path.