

Maundy Thursday & Easter Sunday 2021 – ‘Peter’

Part 1: Maundy Thursday

This Easter weekend we'll be focusing on Peter. There are so many ways we can approach the greatest story of them all – but Peter is a brilliant way in, because Peter, perhaps more than any of the other disciples, is so much like us. Peter's story defines what it means to be human.

We love Peter: the big heart, the big mouth, the big failures, the big restoration. Peter gives us all hope, because **what Jesus saw in Peter is what we all hope he sees in us too.** Not just what we are, but also what we can *become*.

In a moment, we're going to watch the first of two brilliant videos, as Peter tells the story of this weekend. The second part will be shown on Easter Sunday, but today we capture the drama of the final few days of Jesus' life. I'm sure it will speak to each of us in its own way, but it reminds me of three very simple, but essential truths:

The first is this – **there but for the grace of God...** Most of us will never be tested quite as the disciples were, but deep down, we *all* face the same temptations, the same pressures. Peter's story sheds light on our own weakness and frailty, and casts us back to the big story of this week: that God saves weak and frail people like us.

Second, what happens to the disciples reminds us **why Jesus gives us this special memorial**, the one we commemorate tonight. Before a perfectly loving and just God, we all need forgiveness, and Easter shows us what it cost God to make that real for us. For all that ours is a spiritual journey, having a *physical* reminder of his body and blood makes it more real to us – frail, flesh-and-blood humans. Maundy Thursday connects us to Good Friday in a deep and real way.

Which is another way of saying that, finally, **Maundy Thursday always points us forward.** As we shared on Sunday, we are led to think 'What happens next?' Peter's denial is not the end for him, just as the Last Supper is really the first meal not the final meal – the first of a new era, as even today we continue to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

So now, we'll let the story tell itself, after which we'll have the chance to respond, and then turn to prayer (and thank you to Lisa for our prayers). This is Peter, part 1, mock trial to denial...

Part 2: Easter Sunday

'That changes everything.'

If I was to ask you for a 3-word summary of why Easter Sunday is so important, you couldn't do much better than Peter's summary at the end of the video: that changes everything.

The empty tomb is so much more than an iconic image, though it is that.

So much more than a happy ending story, though it is that, too.

It is **the sign that all our greatest enemies – sin, evil, death have been defeated**. That what Jesus promised before his death – to give his life as a ransom for many, in other words to set many free – was absolutely true. In other words, that Jesus is exactly who he said he is: the Son of God, the bringer of life to all who believe in his name.

Easter is ultimately about identity. Jesus' identity as Saviour and Lord. Our identity as fallen beings in need of a rescuer. And in the midst of that, Peter too discovers his true identity. It didn't start well, of course – he blew it three times – but then survived his identity crisis to be restored by Jesus.

We get the first stirrings that Peter will come good early on Sunday morning. When the women bring them the amazing news, it's Peter who rushes out of the door first. Guilty conscience, perhaps, but also a renewed boldness that had deserted him two days earlier. And just like the Peter we know, even though John runs faster, it's Peter who charges straight into the tomb. The old Peter, you might say – but perhaps also the new Peter. Ready to live out his faith openly, to lead, to take risks.

That changes everything. It certainly did for Peter. And Peter's story is our story. The empty tomb changes everything for us, too. Forgiveness is assured. New life is a reality. A new identity is possible – we are no longer just human beings, we are human *becomings*.

On one level, every Sunday is Easter Sunday. From this point on, we may celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus every week. That's why many churches prefer to use the name Easter Day, to differentiate it. But whatever you call it, this annual celebration is special. It takes us back to first principles.

Easter weekend changes everything. The cross, the empty tomb. Jesus' divine identity is confirmed and glorified, that our fallen identity might not be fixed all time. There is hope, there is life, there is a new power at work in the world, and in us: the resurrection power of Jesus. And that, as Peter says, changes everything. Amen.