

Lutheran Church of the Master, 4800 Ramsey Road, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho Pastor Neal Buckaloo Sunday, August 7 th , 2011 The 8 th Sunday after Pentecost
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It was 35 years ago that we were introduced to a character named Rocky Balboa in the movie titled **Rocky** (1976).

Rocky Balboa is a struggling boxer trying to make the big time. Working in a meat factory in Philadelphia for a pittance, he also earns extra cash as a debt collector. When heavyweight champion Apollo Creed visits Philadelphia, his managers want to set up an exhibition match between Creed and a struggling boxer, touting the fight as a chance for a "nobody" to become a "somebody". The match is supposed to be easily won by Creed, but someone forgot to tell Rocky, who sees this as his only shot at the big time.¹ Subsequently we were presented with Rocky II, Rocky III, and so on.

The Rocky of the Bible is Simon Peter. He received the name Peter from Jesus. This is described for us in Matthew 16¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven."¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." Like the Rocky of the '70s movie, our Rocky, Simon Peter, is also a flawed character.

The text where Jesus gives Simon the name Peter continues:²¹ From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

It was not the last time that Peter had his mind set on human things rather than divine things. Do you remember raising your hand in school with a comment that you were confident would impress the teacher? Well, that is Simon Peter here: ^{Matthew 18: 21} Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"²² Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times seven." As you know, when you multiply by 10's in Jesus' day it is not straight mathematics but many times over, beyond counting.

Later, as Jesus was with his disciples at the last supper, ^{Matthew 26: 31} Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; . . ."³³ Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you."³⁴ Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times."³⁵ Peter said to him, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples.

And you know what happened for Peter, hanging out near where Jesus was on trail that night. After his denying he even knew Jesus three times over, a cock did crow three times. ^{Matthew 26: 75} Then Peter

¹ Written by Murray Chapman <muzzle@cs.uq.oz.au> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0075148/plotsummary> 8.4.11

remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

In the Gospel of Mathew, Peter is a stand in for you and me and the rest of the Christian church. This is all illustrated in the Gospel for today. As back ground, when Moses was confronted by the burning bush in Exodus, he asked God a question. Exodus 3: ¹³ But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "**I am** who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, '**I am** has sent me to you.'" God identified God's self by the words '**I AM.**'

Now to our passage in the 14th chapter of Matthew. Jesus had just fed the five thousand plus women and children multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish. Matthew 14: 22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25 And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, **I AM**; do not be afraid."

What is the importance of Jesus identifying himself here? Clearly, this is no ghost but the very presence of God, the God of Abraham, and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. The very presence we need when we cry for help. God with us; Emmanuel. . . . But what happens?

Peter and perhaps the rest of the disciples are still unsure and are fear-filled. Peter says, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." In spite of Jesus clearly declaring "Take heart, **I AM**; do not be afraid" Peter puts Jesus to the test.

So when Peter says, "If it is you..." (ei su ei in the Greek), then he is joining the company of Satan (4:3, 6), the high priest (26:63), and the mockers at the cross (27:40) who all put the same challenge to Jesus. In each case, just like Peter, they want Jesus to do something in order to verify his identity.

This is not a good thing.²

The problems for Peter are compounded. ^{Matthew 14: 29} Jesus said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Do you recognize this person, Peter? I would guess he appear in your mirror every once in a while. We, the church, are called to be a light to the nations, a beacon on a hill giving light and hope to our neighbors. But like Peter, we to are hesitant, fearful, cautious.

Does this story teach disciples that they *can* believe and do great things? Or does it teach disciples that they *cannot* sustain faith by themselves and that sooner or later they, too, disbelieve and sink, thus needing the miraculous Savior? . . .The answer seems to be that the story teaches both-we can and we cannot. The 'can' comes exclusively

from the powerful command of Jesus—"Come on!," which Peter sought in bold prayer. The 'cannot' comes from our inevitable looking around at life's 'realities' and so sinking. We do both continually.³

We both can and cannot do what God calls us to do. ^{Matthew 14:32} When (Peter and Jesus) got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." We can respond to God's beacon to us to be a light to others, but we like Peter, become distracted, doubtful, hesitant. We too have need to cry out "Lord, save me!" And he, Jesus, does. Amen.

³ Bruner, Dale. Matthew: Volume 2, The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28 . Dallas: Word Publishing. 1990. P. 534