

This summer we've been through many aspects of who Jesus, God with skin on, was and is. Today we bring our summer preaching series to a close as we finish with exploring Jesus as Delegator. What a summer! From Vagabond to Delegator. "No sooner had The Way (the first name for the church) got going than the keepers of the status quo tried to stamp it out. And who can blame them? It was one thing for Jesus to say and do wild things, but it was another to have these 'uneducated and ordinary men' saying that Jesus had been raised from the dead and have authorized them to say and do the same things as Jesus. You see, the Jesus story didn't end at his crucifixion. It continued, but when the earthly Jesus became the risen Christ, a cast of unlikely characters was enlisted to continue the drama" (Will Willimon, *Why Jesus?*). People like the apostle Peter, but "the risen Christ stood in the wings, coaching, calling them when their time came to act their parts, giving them lines they were to speak. Ordinary people were now acting like Jesus" (Willimon). Peter's story is one of the most vivid faith journeys in all of Scripture. He is both deeply flawed and deeply faithful—a disciple whose life shows us what it means to stumble and be restored by grace. Peter (originally named *Simon*) was a fisherman from Bethsaida, working alongside his brother Andrew, who first introduced him to Jesus (John 1:40-42). Jesus called them both saying, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people" (Matt. 4:19). Jesus renamed *Peter* ("rock"), signaling his future role in the church. Peter often acted first and thought later. Like when he burst out confessing that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus affirmed this as divine revelation and promised: "*On this rock I will build my church.*" Yet moments later, when Jesus spoke of suffering and death, Peter rebuked Him—and was told: "*Get behind me, Satan!*" (Matthew 16:23). Peter's highs and lows show his deep devotion but also his human frailty. Though bold

and passionate—confessing Jesus as Messiah and even walking on water—he also stumbled, most notably denying Jesus not once but three times. This was after having resisted when Jesus washed his feet at the Last Supper. Then Peter overcorrected, asking for his whole body to be washed (John 13:6-9). After the resurrection, Jesus restored him and commissioned him to “feed my sheep.” Filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter became a bold leader, preaching, healing, confronting religious authorities and opening the gospel to Gentiles. His letters (1 and 2 Peter) reveal a shepherd’s heart-encouraging believers to endure suffering, remain steadfast, and hope in Christ’s return. Peter’s journey—from fisherman to fearful denier to bold apostle-reminds us that discipleship is not about perfection, but about being transformed by Jesus’ mercy. So then, why Peter when we’re talking about Jesus? Because Jesus began his work in the world by calling a group of twelve ordinary people to drop what they were doing and do what he wanted them to do. Peter is just one of those twelve to highlight. “Something about Jesus made him choose, from the first, not to save the world by himself. He wouldn’t be God alone. Jesus chose them not because they were open and receptive to his teaching, not because he enjoyed hanging out with them, but because he wanted to lay an assignment on them. It was as if Jesus was so confident in his sovereignty that he could afford not to be a micromanager or hands-on leader. He is the quintessential delegator” (Willimon). And Peter followed- mostly- what Jesus said. When writing a pep talk of sorts in 1 Peter, Peter pulls out all the Hebrew Scripture stops to connect between past and present, even though he’s speaking to mostly Gentiles. In other words, “he reads the situation of his audience from the perspective of the career of Jesus Christ, and the career of Jesus Christ from the perspective of Israel’s Scriptures” (Joel B.

Green, *FOW*). In other words, we learn ways of faith from the examples of Israel's ancestors, from the visionary ideals of the prophets and from the apostles' teaching. Peter, by rooting his letter in scriptural language, cannot conceive of God's action in the world apart from God's relationship with the whole of God's people. "As Christ is, so is the Christian. As the church this is our only calling, and our only hope" (Karl Jacobson, workingpreacher.org). Before turning to God's word for us this day, let us first pray. **PRAY. READ.**

If we profess to follow Jesus in our words, then our actions must match. Peter insists that the Christian life particularly equips believers with all they will need to proclaim the mighty acts of the One who calls us out of the shadows and into the marvelous light. Jesus enlists ordinary folks to a much larger project than our own lives. He sweeps us up into a pageant otherwise known as the kingdom of God. Let me be clear. "Jesus is not here to get what you want out of God. Jesus is God's means of getting what God wants out of you. Jesus is not an effective way we climb up to God; Jesus is God's self-appointed means of getting down to us. Perhaps that's why few people came to Jesus; he went to them. Jesus rarely said, 'Love me,' and never said, 'Agree with me.' Rather, he most frequently commanded simply, 'Follow me.' Then he said, 'Don't be afraid.' What does that tell you about the way Jesus invites us to walk?" (Willimon). It's a scary thing for someone like Peter, me, or you to be called by Jesus, not only "because Jesus is often demanding and difficult but also because he places such great faith in his followers. To follow him is to serve him, and to serve him is to be sent out to do what he does. Jesus didn't want for people to feel the need for something better in their lives; he intruded into their lives, turning them upside down" (Willimon). Just look at Peter or look in a mirror. "To be a Christian is to be someone put here

by the great delegator. If the world doesn't like the idea of your being a follower of Jesus, a Christ-bearer into the world, you can say, 'Take it up with Jesus. This Jesus: he won't take 'no' for an answer. To be a Jesus-follower is more than something that you chose or your decided for yourself. If you follow Jesus, it's primarily because he invited you to walk with him. You got adopted. As Jesus told his disciples, 'You didn't choose me; I chose you that you should go bear fruit in my name' (John 15:16). To us has been delegated the work of the kingdom. Even as he assigns to us his work, surely, he knows that he is calling us to fill roles too big for us" (Willimon).

The reason I wanted to remind us today of the apostle Peter's faith journey is because we're all amateurs in regard to Jesus. None of us have Jesus nor this Jesus follower stuff figured out. No. We try and fail and try again- thanks be to God for mercy- new every morning. "Jesus eludes our grasp, just as he wouldn't be held down at the tomb by Mary Magdalene. There is no way to commandeer or to manage the sovereign judgements of a righteous God. Jesus loves to shock and surprise the very people who thought they knew him so well. We don't know what we're doing. BUT we have faith that Jesus knows what he is doing. Yes, Jesus probably should have called and chosen someone else to 'go and bear fruit,' but he didn't. Yes, we all have our limitations. Yet, by God's grace and the stories and actions of Jesus, we know what God is doing. Believe that God knows what God is doing by calling someone like you and me to witness to the kingdom on earth. Sure, the shoes are too big for us. Sure, we have doubts, fears, and big reservations. Jesus can work with all of that; he has done so ever since the calling of the first disciples, including Peter. The composition of the citizenry of the kingdom is the prerogative of the King. Salvation belongs not to any of us but to 'the Lamb,' to the one who

sits on the throne. The guest list is God's and God has done everything necessary for us to join the party, and God invites us all, now, here" (Willimon).

It is critical in Peter's letter to the churches in Asia Minor and to us today that we cannot fulfill God's calling on our own. Just as Israel received hope and encouragement from prophets like Isaiah and Hosea, so Peter does the same for the early churches he writes to. Yet, for Peter the key foundation of the Church's hope and the Church's life is the same: Christ himself. For it is only through Jesus Christ that we become a "chosen race, a royal priesthood." Peter's letter speaks to all of us as followers of Jesus- not just the church's leaders or clergy. Peter says that everybody in the body of Christ is a preacher, a part of the "royal priesthood," not priests in the church but priests in the whole world. A friend and colleague of mine, Beth, tells the story of her mom, Betty, who was living in Assisted Living at the time. Betty would tell Beth when she visited how Mary, another lady in the community, would always fake being asleep when their pastor would drop by for a visit. Betty was annoyed that Mary did this and thought she shouldn't act that way, especially when she was suffering. "Mary has no problem telling me all of her problems and asking me to pray for her," Betty told Beth. Beth reached over, grabbed her mom's hands, and gave her mom some encouragement saying, "Mother, you're Mary's minister. Jesus has equipped you, and Mary has chosen you to share her struggles and joys with and to pray for her." Betty had never thought of it that way before. Peter knows the need for his encouragement. Suffering is a reality for Christians who witness to Christ's kingship in a world of idolatrous power. Peter's hope in divine love is stronger than Death itself. "Jesus is the great Delegator, the One who refuses to reign alone, the One who enlists ordinary women and men to work with him and for

him, to be his body, commissioned to be the only glimpse of Jesus most people will ever see” (Willimon). That’s right. Look around this place. Look to your neighbor and the other neighbor. We are a visible, bodily sign of what God can do, and is doing, in the world to set things right. Again, Peter reminds them and us that this is possible only because of Christ. “In the first centuries of the Christian era, when at least two plagues decimated the Roman population, and rich people and their priests fled the cities, the Christians stayed and cared for the sufferers, no matter who they were. In just a century or so, this small sect became the dominant faith of the empire. These Christians put into practice a story and an ethic that was a rebuke and an alternative to the ways of the culture. Thus, the world took note of Jesus by noticing his followers. Jesus’ people are to look and act differently than the world. He works with a countercultural notion of greatness. Jesus dared to offer himself as a model for his followers. And Jesus’ followers dare to attempt to copy Jesus. Rather than lower the bar to the level where almost anybody could succeed as a disciple, he raised the bar so high that no one could succeed without lots of divine help” (Willimon). Jesus calls us and sends us out, as he did to his disciples in the Great Commission, to proclaim something of what we know about God to the world. This is no small calling. As God’s own people, we live in the real world of the already but not yet. That means that we live in a world that is full of beauty and death, but we live as people of hope. Lord knows there are many holes in the world and in Jesus’ name, we can change the world. One of my favorite Howard Thurman quotes is, “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” I must warn you though: God can be a terrible nagger (a repeat offender in your heart and mind). Christianity has not

been tried and found lacking; it's been tried and found to be hard. This is one of the many reasons we need a discerning and prayer-filled community. For you or I could just be walking along Rutherford St. or Stone Ave., minding our own business, when suddenly, Jesus shows up, surprises us, joins our table, feeds us, talks to us, opens the Scriptures, and we see, to our amazement, that Jesus has invited himself into our lives. When this happens, we must brace ourselves; there's a good chance that Jesus is going to assign you and me a job! What purpose, dignity and joy we can find though in who and what we've been delegated to be and do by Jesus! One Sunday after having witnessed someone playing the piano, six-year old Violet, asked if she could come and play the piano in church the following Sunday. Sunday came, and Violet was terrified, but she kept her commitment. She made a few mistakes, and she gave an offering to God. Jesus said and did it and told others to go and do likewise- people like Peter, Violet, and you and me. "Great is thy faithfulness...morning by morning...new mercies I see...all that I've needed Thy hand hath provided...great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me." To God be the glory! Amen.