

Jesus and Simon Peter's Transformation Luke 22:28-34; 54-62

I want to take a look this morning at what a rough diamond like Simon Peter can teach us about our own spiritual transformation when we consider his denial of Jesus on our Lenten journey with him to the cross.

Let's begin by going deeper. Right under our feet on this planet there is a geological process happening where metamorphic rocks are formed under the surface of the earth from the metamorphosis, the change that is, that occurs due to intense heat and the pressure of some almighty squeezing as when rock in a subduction zone, where two tectonic plates meet and one is driven down as is the case of New Zealand where the Pacific plate meets the Indo-Australian tectonic plate and is driven down below it. So it is then, that when subducted rocks are heated up and/or put under a lot of pressure, they can change drastically. And this is because the minerals that make up the rocks form only at certain temperatures and pressures. At high temperatures or pressures, the elements will rearrange their crystal structure to form a different mineral. Graphite for instance is a mineral that is made entirely out of carbon. If we put graphite under a huge amount of pressure, the carbon atoms will be squeezed together and will rearrange themselves into the more compact crystal structure of diamonds. This change happens without any melting of the rock or liquefying phase so that everything remains solid while the metamorphism occurs. And diamonds serve as our example of crystals of pure carbon that form under crushing pressures and intense heat deep within the Earth's mantle, the layer beneath the crust or surface layer, at a depth of about 150km.

Now I don't know if you know, but they reach the earth's surface or near to it, by way of a volcanic eruption. And we live in Auckland which has a number of extinct volcanic domes scattered around and hill chains made from volcanoes like here at Drury. So has anyone found any diamonds lately? No? Only the ones that the ladies are wearing as jewellery this morning!

Like diamonds, I have something precious to share with you from our scripture reading this morning. In the heat of the moment and under the crucifying pressure of Jesus' arrest by the authorities, and imminent death on the cross, a transformation of metamorphic proportions was taking place in Simon Peter. Just as carbon atoms are transformed and change to form into a diamond through the exertion of great pressure and unbearable heat

so it was with Peter when not just one, but three people attempted to *squeeze* the truth out of him, but in his case it was the denial atoms, and disappointment, failure, grief and guilt atoms that were to metamorphosis into precious diamond hard and rock solid faith- just as Jesus had prayed, not only for him, but for all of the disciples. So that Simon who Jesus called Peter could live up to his name as the leader of the apostles whose teaching was to become the bedrock on which the foundation of the Christian church is built and of which the demonic powers of death and hell cannot and will not overcome. But first, on the journey to the cross with Jesus, Simon called Peter was severely put to the test. And from our reading we know that Simon called Peter, although he had sworn to stand with Jesus no matter what, that Peter did keep his promise to a point, even cutting the ear of a servant of the high priest as recorded by John, but then he along with the rest of the rest of the disciples then deserted Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane after Judas came and betrayed him with a kiss.

Peter did run, but not so far that he could not see Jesus under arrest, so he was able to follow him. But then it was out of the frying pan and into the fire. He had failed Jesus once already and now he was about to enter the crucible of abject Failure in front of Jesus- His blatant Denial of Christ! Satan, last week we learnt behind the scenes had tempted then eventually entered and took over Judas' life through his sin and that did not go well for Judas! We have heard that Satan had asked to sift all of the apostles as wheat including Judas and Peter.

To sift (V31) here means to shake and agitate internally. It is like the force of the Canterbury earthquake four years ago that turned the sedimentary loam under Christchurch city to liquefy as in liquefaction that bubbled up into the streets and homes of Christchurch. When Satan shakes and sifts he is inwardly attempting to try one's faith to the verge of overflow, the point where are at the very edge of faith you could easily want to jump or fall off, walking away from God and the church. Liquefaction is the right pressurised point of heat and shaking that creates liquid, so that faith like liquid would simply run out of you for good. Now Satan does not have the authority and power to shake and agitate us to the point where he destroys our faith outright-you have to let him! Satan can sift, agitate, turn up the heat and pressurise you in an attempt to create the necessary conditions for you to fail, to sin, then to doubt, harden your heart and even sin some more to get you to the point where you do not ever want to seek to return, to humble yourself and turn to God in repentance- but you have to make

that decision to turn, and when you do, the good news is that Satan can't prevent you from receiving God's love, undeserved mercy, forgiveness and healing. He cannot rule as sovereign over your own inner self-determination to choose and actually turn to God, as in the case of Peter. Peter's faith under the duress of this trial did not serve to drive him from God or the fellowship of the remaining disciples as it had Judas. He remained with them and with God in Jesus.

In the crucible of the abject failure of him denying Christ three times, rather than his faith running out of him, it transformed him just as in the process of metamorphosis. It never turned to liquid. Instead the carbon like atoms of denial, disappointment, failure, grief and guilt atoms were to metamorphose, the process of which does not include a liquid state, into precious diamond hard and rock solid faith as Jesus had prayed for and meant the church founded on his apostles, with Peter as their leader, to be. Satan may have sifted attempting to melt not just Peter's faith but all of the disciples, but God remained Sovereign in their lives and as a result they were all, except Judas, spiritually transformed through the process on their journey with Jesus to the cross.

We can ask ourselves today, "Will I allow the spirit of God to transform me, through my own sin and failures, through the stress and pressures of life's difficult and most trying circumstances, through all the flames of adversity, will I always commit to humble myself and turn to God in order to take these circumstances and allow a spiritual metamorphosis in the depth of my being to change me for the good, into a solid follower of Christ with diamond hard rock like faith?" Just like Peter whose character became like that of a rough diamond, as though to speak, after this transformation but a diamond all the same, precious to God, to Jesus and his church.

Just like Peter, God in Jesus Christ is able to take you at your worst and under the heat of the conviction of the Holy Spirit with regards to right and wrong, transform you and me for the good further into the likeness of Christ. ...If you choose to let him, let him into to your life to come by his spirit to transform you, to His Glory. What I have learned in my life, that when the heat is on with regards to my faith journey, when I personally fail, when I am greatly struggling with what's happening in my life, my marriage, my family, the church, or anywhere, it is for a good reason and not only that, it can be used by God to transform me from the inside out- just like Simon who through his failures truly became Peter the rough diamond.

I call him a rough diamond because although he went through this major spiritual transformation, becoming the leader of Christ's church and experiencing and witnessing the power of God in his bold ministry where from the Day of Pentecost, thousands were saved and many were healed from sickness and continued to be delivered from evil spirits, he still continued on occasion to make mistakes and stuff up rather badly on occasion. One thing this spiritual metamorphic change didn't do was to make him perfect like an expensive cut and polished diamond. Hence he's a diamond who God was continuing to knock off the sharp edges off and work on cutting and polishing him like the rough diamond that he was, continuing to challenge and work on him, preparing him for heaven.

But first, the cock had to crow as Peter had denied that he knew Jesus, acting entirely unlike himself as one of his closest connected companions, disowning him completely right there in his presence for the third time, at which Jesus turns and looks straight at him instantly reminding him of Jesus' prediction and his own response at the last supper, and not only that but adding extra weight for Peter was three years of relationship with Jesus and his teaching. He had heard Jesus speak in

Luke 12 ⁸I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. ⁹But whoever disowns (denies) me before others will be disowned before the angels of God.

And Peter went outside and wept bitterly. And in this time of grief, failure and disappointment transformation occurred. In this lowly state he retained the power of self-determination. He did not give into Satan's sifting but instead, God's sovereignty. He was able to ask himself the question, in spite of my current mood and feelings, "How did I contribute to this mess?" Peter I believe made no attempt to shift any blame but to accept the responsibility for the outcome of his own choice to deny Jesus three times. Anger was not employed after the grief in order to avoid guilt or owning up to what he'd done. Peter certainly didn't play the victim which would have allowed Satan to trample all over him. No, instead after weeping bitterly he went on to process his dreadful feelings of failure, disappointment, guilt and, Lord forbid, rejection. Peter through this metamorphic transition managed to determine somehow to make an effort to stay in reality and find the truth necessary to work through it, even in witnessing Jesus' suffering and to his death on the cross. Peter's self-sufficient courage may have failed him when he needed it the most, but we know that this is not the end of Peter because after his resurrection, Jesus brought Peter fully to

repentance and restoration. At the tomb the angel said to the women, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you'" (Mark 16:7). At the Sea of Galilee, Jesus gave Peter three opportunities to reaffirm his love for his Master, and three times commissioned him to "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-19). He was restored!

No one is beyond the redemption and forgiveness of Jesus.

And this is where Peter's story becomes our story, where we get to list not only our strengths but importantly also, our flaws of character, spiritual weakness' and failures, our disappointments, that in our weakened state would seek to destroy our faith through the challenging circumstances of life that we often find ourselves in, whether it be totally of our own making or not. These were the perfection conditions created for transformation to occur in Peter's life, and now serve to do the same in ours. Remember 'when' and not 'if' these conditions eventuate in your life, you retain the right to self-determine whose power you will come under, whose process you'll enter. I pray that it is God's metamorphic transformation that you'll submit yourself too, and not Satan's sifting who is determined to destroy your faith in Christ.

To wrap up this morning, both today as we celebrate communion, and then as we continue on our journey of spiritual transformation through Lent, may we examine our frail, flawed soul, and with Jesus enter the dark areas of our mind and souls, our sin, and journey with him to his death on the cross where we may then be crucified with Christ, and buried in the likeness of his death, so that when we hear the words on Easter Sunday "He is risen!"—perhaps for the first time even, we might truly celebrate the resurrection—because we have chosen to die so that we may have life through our spiritual transformation.