19th Sunday after Trinity
Last in a Series on the 12 Apostles
Rolling Meadows - 1964

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. John 1: 42 Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

PETER

Of all the Apostles I would like to have ~~known~~ met Peter most of all. He is one ~~character~~ person especially whom I want to search out and meet in the Mansions of Heaven. (If we can talk about favorites among the saints of God, Peter would come very close to getting my vote.) Perhaps you feel the same way. He lives for us in the pages of Scripture. He's there — vibrantly alive, intensely human - colorful, impetuous, outspoken. (If you imagine that pastor's don't have feelings - that we are not sometimes discouraged and at other times elated - you are mistaken, grossly mistaken. We have our up's and down's just like anyone else. When I am down, I like to pick up my Bible and read about what our Lord made out of a man called Peter.) The Big Fisherman he has often been called - the man ~~of~~ with the rugged physique - the great, strong body, the rough, hard hands, accustomed to hauling dripping nets out of the Sea of Galilee and sailing a fishing boat on stormy waters - with a voice and personality to go with it - the big fisherman who became, at the Lord's command a fisher of men. In some ways Peter was the weakest of Christ's disciples - and in many ways he was the strongest too. We shudder at some of the things he did and said, and we admire him for others. We are amazed at his denial - yet, we love him as one of the noblest of them all.

Do we love him because of his weaknesses - because we are so often guilty of the same failings and weaknesses? We had better be honest ~~with ourselves~~ about that and remember that Peter ~~was~~ is great and beloved not because of what he was when Jesus met him, but because of what he became under the influence of Christ - molded, like clay in the hands of a master potter, into a vessel of rugged beauty, great strength and usefulness.

It all began that day when his brother, Andrew, came home, all excited, shouting that he had found the Messiah. We don't know what Peter replied to his brother. St. John reports simply, He brought him to Jesus. There may be a hint in these words that Peter had to be dragged a little. After all, it was late in the

day and this was a preposterous assumption. But Peter went along, and soon he wa looking into the eyes of Jesus - and Jesus was looking into the eyes of Peter, an He said, So you are Simon, the son of John? You shall be called Cephas. Today tl words of Jesus would sound like this: So you're Simon Johnson! I'm going to call you 'The Rock!'

One day, many months later, Jesus asked His disciples, What are people saying about Me? They answered, Some say that you are John the Baptist come back to life; others say Elijah, or Jeremiah, or some other prophet. Quietly Jesus asked, What do you think? It was Peter who answered - Peter, the self-appointed speaker of the house - who so often spoke up for the rest. You are the Christ, he said, the Son of the living God! And Jesus said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Johnson, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, You are Peter (the Rock) and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.... It was a promise and a power which, on Easter afternoon, was bestowed by the risen Savior upon the other disciples, too: Receive ye the Holy Ghost, He said to them. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. But Peter was the first. He had come a long way since Andrew had first brought him to Jesus. Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth, had become for him the Son of God and promised Redeemer, even before His awful death and glorious resurrection and Peter's marvellous confession of faith became for Christ the rock foundation on which, He said, He would build His church. Ever since, we who have shared that faith and that confession have been a part of His Church, the communion of saints.

This didn't mean, however, that Peter was ready now for graduation from Christ's training school. It was just a short time later that he earned from Jesus a terrible rebuke. Jesus had been telling them that He must return to Jerusalem to suffer there at the hands of His enemies, and to die. Peter...began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid, Lord!' This shall never happen to You.' But Jesus turned and

said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.' Peter was arguing with the purposes of God. He had dared to stand in the way when Jesus was about to begin His journey to the Cr When you do that, Jesus said, you are on Satan's side and stand with sinful men. Speaking to them all, He said, If any man would come after Me, let him deny himsel and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

How often, like Peter, haven't we thought that other things were more im portant than the things of God? How reluctantly we deny ourselves and make only a pretext of taking up the Cross to follow Him! How little of life - our time, our talents, our treasure - we are willing to sacrifice for Him! Some people have not been willing at all. Trying to keep it all for themselves - life and the things o life - they have lost it all. They have gone to death and damnation unsaved. Others, laying their lives at His feet, willing to give it all up for Him, willing to bear His Cross, have found life — eternal life in Him!

Someone has said that Peter was consistently inconsistent. He was alway going from the heights to the depths and back again. There was that stormy day on the Sea of Galilee when he had courage enough and faith enough even to walk on the water toward his welcoming Lord. Suddenly, finding himself beyond the safety of the boat, terrified by the wind and waves, he became afraid and sank, crying, Lord, save me! In the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday Peter didn't want Jesus to wash his feet. A moment later he said, Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head! That night he solemnly assured his Lord that he would die with Him before he would forsake Him. A few hours later he was trying to prove by cursing like a godless fisherman that he had never heard of Jesus. In the Garden he slashed about with hi sword, playing the big hero, ready to fight the whole army single-handed. A moment later he ran away — Consistently inconsistent!

How quickly we fault him for it, forgetting the strange inconsistencies of our own discipleship. One moment we are deeply religious - the next God seems a

million miles away. One moment our faith is strong and wholesome - the next it is riddled with questions and doubts. One moment we love this Savior of ours with all our hearts - the next we hear ourselves denying Him, ashamed to have a part in Him. We hear a sermon, read something in the Bible, and we make up our minds to be better Christians - and then we immediately forget our good resolutions. We are troubled in conscience by the fact that we go to church irregularly and receive the holy sacrament just once in a great while - and we tell ourselves that we ought to be doing much better, but we don't. When we do come, we confess our sins, saying to our heavenly Father, I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and sincerely and earnestly purpose, by the assistance of God the Holy Ghost, henceforth to amend my sinful life - and then we go home and go on living just as we did before. We pray, Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us - and the next day we are just as mean and irritable and unforgiving as ever. Consistently inconsistent -- that's our discipleship too.

The wonderful thing about Peter is that the man of clay became a rock. It meant months of being hammered and pounded on the anvils of God - of being molded by a mercy such as only the Son of God would apply to such a man. No matter what Peter said or did, no matter how brave or foolish, the love of Jesus was always there, praising him when he deserved to be praised, scolding him sternly when he needed the discipline of a strong rebuke, warning him in the face of danger, saving him always when he needed to be saved. In the courtyard of his shameful denial it was the searching look of the Savior that pierced him to the depths of his soul. On Easter morning it was the message of the angel to the women at the empty tomb, Go tell His disciples and Peter. Don't forget Peter; he needs it even more than the others. That day Jesus appeared to Peter alone - and again, many times, with the other disciples. Then, days later, they were back in Galilee, back at the old business of fishing, and Jesus appeared to them once more, and they ate with Him at dawn on the beach. That morning Jesus said to Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? Three times the question came and three times there came the tortured

answer of the fallen disciple, Lord, You know that I love You! Three times the risen Savior replied, Feed My lambs! Feed My sheep! And finally, You will serve Me, Peter, and you will die for Me. Follow Me.

Soon it was Pentecost, and the promises of the ascended Savior were fulfilled in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now there was nothing in all the world tha could shake the rock that was Peter and the rock that was Peter's faith. With one fearless and magnificent sermon 3000 converts were brought into the infant church. Cut to the heart, they had sensed the flaming power of the Spirit. They heard the message of Him who was crucified and had risen again.

Peter grew old in the service of His Lord. Caligula, Claudius, Nero, followed each other on the throne of imperial Rome - waves of persecution swept across the Christian church - fleeing believers scattered the seeds of the faith wherever they went - even in death by martyrdom converts were gained for the etern kingdom. Peter wrote to them, strengthening them in their fiery trials, reminding them that they had been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jes Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time...After you have suffered a whil he told them, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, establish, strengthen you. How well he knew. It wa his own story from beginning to end! God grant that it may be your story too, and mine. Amen.