

Rector's Letter March 2024

On this rock I will build my church



Dear Friends,

Jesus asked his disciples, “who do people say that I am?” They replied that some said he was Elijah or one of the prophets. Then he asked them, “but what about you, who do you say that I am?”, and Peter replied “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”. Jesus praised Peter, and said he was right. He called Peter the rock on which he would build his church. But Peter seemed to be more like quick sand over the coming weeks.

Peter had not understood what it meant for Jesus to be God’s Son. When Jesus told Peter that he was going to die in Jerusalem Peter said “no”. Peter had not grasped the breadth and depth of God’s love. Equally he had no expectation of Jesus’s victory in his resurrection.

Jesus talked about being the good shepherd, who would lay down his life to save his sheep. In response, Peter declared that he would lay down his life for Jesus, but they proved to be empty words.

When Jesus was arrested, Peter’s world fell apart. All his hopes and expectations shattered. When he was asked “you’re one of his disciples aren’t you?” he denied it. Three times he was asked and three times he lied. Then the cock crowed and Peter remembered Jesus’ words that before the cock crowed Peter would deny that he knew Jesus three times. Peter wept bitterly. He had failed to live to his own standards and expectations. He went home broken. He didn’t feel like a rock. He felt a failure.

But when Jesus rose again he met with Peter. Jesus did not pretend Peter had stayed strong. He brought back the memories by asking Peter three times whether he loved him. And Peter, knowing his own weakness spoke the truth of his love. Jesus called him to care for his lambs, to feed the sheep, to be a good shepherd. Peter became the rock that Jesus said he would be.

In our culture, our response to failure is so different. Football managers who have a bad run get sacked. And so often the next leader does little better. Jesus shows us that getting things wrong, making a mess, being a “failure” does not have to be a disaster. Instead, we can learn from the experience and move on, becoming stronger and more competent. Where that positive approach prevails it is also easier to be honest, rather than being defensive and blaming others.

And so often our biggest critics are ourselves. We can’t cope with getting things wrong. I hope we can all know that Jesus accepts us as we are, including our weaknesses, and that in his way we can become the people he calls us to be.

Happy Easter.
Peter

