

Hot Air

“It can be different.”

Acts 4:13-20

First in the series: Redemption (how Christ can change a life)

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The Bottom

All-along, he'd been self-assured, mostly. Aware of the world and able to relate to people, he had done fairly well in college and had a goodly number of friends. Through it all he could be loud and brash and think highly enough of himself that he believed he could do about anything he set his mind to accomplish. Any question that came his way was met with a ready answer. He had them all. If he didn't have the facts, truth be told, he'd make some up.

But then one New Years Eve he met with yet another of a series of disappointments and the truth came home to him. He didn't have it all together. Not even close. Then, at once he felt sorry for himself and made more of the moment than he should have. He spun out of the party by himself and walked into the woods, taking a trail by an icy river and he just moved with the night.

Gone was his feeling of invincibility. He just felt...insufficient; and he didn't think he had all the answers any more. He just felt like crying when he stopped after a while and sat down in the snow. “Why?” he asked (maybe out-loud). “Why, God? What did I ever do?”

He wasn't about to hurt himself. But in a way he'd come to an end: the end of a way of living in which he thought he could fix any problem and accomplish any goal...by himself. “God, what did I do to deserve this?” And he sat in the snow with no where to go.

Too bad it would take him several months before he'd move on from the end into a new beginning.

I know it might be a different circumstance and some differences in the story; but have you ever been there? Sort of?

Simon Peter and A Transformation You Wouldn't Believe

More than *sort of* for Simon Peter. He was the epitome of a man with a bunch of hot air. Boisterous Simon, son of a fisherman taking up the trade himself: he must have been the sort of guy that lived up to the fisherman's image. Close to the earth and a man of the inland sea, he'd rise early in the day to shove off shore and cast his nets with faith enough that he'd draw them back full of fish.

I picture him singing fisherman's songs and carrying on with the best of his lot – stretching tales of big fish and adventures he had through the inevitable storms they knew too well. Maybe: a bunch of hot air.

He was a man of straight-forward faith, it seems. Once he dropped his nets to follow Jesus and leave the old line of work behind, his old ways held on. One night he was with the others without Jesus when one of those storms blew up. They were tossed like a toy boat on angry waves, wind tearing at their sails as they held tight on their lines and strained at the oars. Just then someone gasped like they saw a ghost and Simon Peter looked and saw it too. Someone was walking, held up somehow on the surface of the waves. What else could it be?

When the familiar voice sounded and they could see it was Jesus it was Peter, hot air and all, who said, "If it's you, then call me to come out and walk on the water, too." So he was called; and he went; and he did all right until he realized what he was doing: taking his eyes off Jesus he began to sink.¹

He just couldn't do it all by himself, could he?

That was Simon Peter. Brash and first to blurt out some boast at times and at others be the first to blurt out a new notion of faith. He was walking with Jesus and the rest of them when Jesus asked them all, "Who are people saying I am (this week)?" And they all answered the things they heard until Jesus asked the next question, "Who do you say I am?" That stopped them. Until Simon Peter blurted out "You are the Messiah!" Hot air?²

There were other times, too; but maybe none so blatantly over-rated than the time soon before everything fell apart when Jesus said someone was going to betray him and he'd be handed over to the powers that be to be crucified. That's when Simon Peter, hot air and all, said so emphatically you'd think there was no way he wouldn't follow through, "Lord, even if it killed me, I would never fall away."³

Then you know what happened. Still that night after Jesus was arrested and beaten and Simon Peter, too, ran and cowered in the shadows people tried to connect him to Jesus and he denied it. Not once, but three times with the kind of language you might expect from an old sailor from up North. "I NEVER KNEW THE MAN."

Then the rooster crowed. And he knew what he'd done. Three times: like a divorce he'd torn himself from the One who'd given him a new life. Wouldn't you go out sobbing like there's no tomorrow?⁴

"God, what have I done to deserve this?" Isn't that what the young man asked, sitting in the snow with no where to go?

If there's anything to the Christian Faith it should be able to make a difference in your life. If it's something worth believing in it should be able to take a Simon Peter and bring him to a place where he can start over and do it differently; even *be it* differently, don't you think?

If it's worth attaching yourself to Jesus, don't you think he should be able to take a young man in the snow, pick him up, and give him more to go on than his own wits?

That's the point.

The thing about Jesus was too strong to keep down. He was resurrected. That's what we believe. Jesus rose again to get into people's lives even more powerfully than before.

The first thing that happened took place at the sea. They were fishing all night when they saw him on the shore, image surrounded by the rising sun. Simon Peter, brash as ever, jumped in the water and swam his way to shore. Then, dripping wet, he heard Jesus ask him three times, "Do you love me?" and three times he answered, "You know I do." Three times, like he was undoing the divorce and mending the tear. Reconnected, Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."⁵

Simon Peter did. When the Spirit of God came with all its outpouring, it was Peter who stood up to tell the story to the world. First sermon. Bluster turned to boldness, hot air turned to fire: Jesus had picked him up and showed him where to go.⁶

That's what leads to this. He and John are full of God's Spirit and heal a man who can't walk. The man gets up from his mat, leaves his alms dish behind and leaps like a

deer – dancing his way into the Temple. That’s what gets Peter and John arrested: their healing and preaching in the name of Jesus.

And when the rulers can’t figure out how uneducated fishermen from up north can be so bold and articulate and filled with God they just tell Peter and John to stop doing it.

Now, this is where I see it most clearly of all. Peter is full of thought. No hot air; only confidence that comes from connection to Jesus and a dependence on a power far greater than himself. He will be obedient to God. That’s all. His defiance is neither stubborn nor rash. In fact, he’s so focused they don’t know what to do.⁷

You see? Jesus Christ can change a life. Any life. Even Peter’s.

It Can Be Different

A young man got up from the snow. Maybe he was lifted. And sometime later he gave himself over so that he wasn’t living life on his own any more. Belonging to Jesus, he found his way to go. That’s what he did to have a kind of life filled with purpose, sufficiency, and self-worth.

It *can* be different, you know. Whatever it is that needs change for you. It can be different.

It all depends on

who you depend on.

¹ Matthew 14:22-33

² Mark 8:27-30

³ Luke 22:31-34

⁴ Luke 22:54-62

⁵ John 21:1-19

⁶ Acts 2:14-36

⁷ Robert W. Will, “The Acts of the Apostles,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. © 2002. p. 90.