

(God's Diamond Edged Blade!)

Introduction

- Last week we met Peter - saw his stumbling attempts to follow his Lord
- Saw something of the way **God shaped this rough diamond!**
- Ended by seeing how **the Cross changed everything:**
 - Peter finally started to stop trusting his own strength.
- That change in direction was empowered by the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the same Spirit who dwells in each of our lives as believers.
- How was God's Spirit able to make use of that **most unlikely of world changers, Peter from Galilee?** That's what we'll be spending time looking at today, glancing briefly at several incidents from Peter's ministry as a kind of cross-section of the service Peter engaged in.

Peter as Evangelist

- *Acts 2:14-41*
- First we see Peter used as an **evangelist**
- **Recount story** - Pentecost - accused of being drunks - stands up and preaches
- He was able to stand up in front of people - without oratorical training, but given bravery and amazing clarity of expression.
- **His approach is quite striking**, given his lack of training!!
 - **Contact:** with Jewish background, and with contemporary situation
 - **Confrontation:** with who Jesus was, who they had actually crucified!
 - **Commitment:** that call for repentance
- Its **broadly the same outline as Paul used** in the vastly different context of preaching to the Athenians - **probably without thought!**

Today...

- Its kind of acceptable for me to stand up and preach, been to University and everything - but this was like someone who'd left school at 16 and always worked with his hands standing up in the centre of Oxford or Cambridge and wowing the leaders and academics!
- **God empowered** - dramatically, suddenly, though also **built on time spent with Jesus**, the time Jesus had spent explaining from the prophets who he was and the significance of his death and resurrection - it all suddenly fitted into place!
- He can do the same with us - make us evangelists - **witnesses to what we have seen of God in our own lives**, sometimes suddenly, but also out of our pasts, the time we have spent getting to know Jesus.

Peter as Apologist

- *Acts 4:1-22*
- Second we see Peter used as an **apologist**
- After he and John had healed lame beggar - speaks before the on-lookers - called before the Sanhedrin - **challenges them with facing who Christ is.**
- Again, God given courage and ability from those without training - the Sanhedrin were astonished! **Took note that they had been with Jesus.**
 - **focus is again on Christ, not on the specific healing they had just performed.**
- Obedience to Jesus' call to proclaim the good news, more than fear of offending.

Today...

- We are more afraid of offending people - so we say nothing.
- Are we afraid of the offense of saying there is no other way to God?
 - ... **"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved!" (Acts 4:12)**
- We have become **apologisers** rather than **apologists** - sorry, don't want to offend you...
- **Not going round, ramming it down people's throats:**

- but lets have the decency to honest to those who ask us what we believe, to those who wonder about what is happening in this crazy mixed up world in which we live, to those who ask what it is that is different about our lives.

Peter as Disciplinarian

- Acts 5:1-11
- Third incident reveals Peter being used to **exercise discipline**
- Ananias & wife tried to deceive God and the church - God's Spirit through Peter pronounced dreadful judgement - dead.
 - dared to claim to be one thing - faithful, upright, generous Christians, while doing something completely different.
- **God hates such hypocrisy.**
 - part and parcel of early church life that it was rooted out like a weed wherever it was found!

Today...

- Difficult one for us today! Another area where we shy away from offending people.
- Take more time and thought to sort out our church discipline:
 - *never simple cases, often what we think of as discipline (telling someone off) does not achieve the effect we desire (greater closeness to Christ and holiness of life)*
 - **how** we "do" discipline may be a question we struggle with,
 - but it is worth noting that such **double standards** are still unacceptable today - **leave no harboured sin....**
 - Peter was prepared to be used to root them out, and so should we - carefully...
- Peter as **Evangelist, Apologist, Disciplinarian** - all forms of service

Peter as Pioneer

- Acts 10:1-11:18
- Final incident is one where Peter was used by God as a **pioneer**
- **Gentile Cornelius** - sends for Peter - Peter's vision of the clean and unclean - messengers arrive - goes with them - proclaims Christ - Spirit comes on them, Gentiles
 - *"Can anyone keep these people from being baptised with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." (Acts 10:47)*
- Peter explains his actions back in Jerusalem - praise God for the wideness of his mercy in even accepting Gentiles.
- Dwell a bit on difficulty of a Jew defiling himself with a Gentile, of them not being absolutely sure (practically) whether Gentiles were "in"...
- **Peter was out on a limb!**

Today...

- Going beyond our own cultural norms - not just the cross-cultural work such missionaries might be involved in - **but also going against the cultural flow** - eg that only regards reasonably well off, or those who talk "nicely" as acceptable:
 - we as a church (Scotland wide) need to be pioneers, reaching beyond our essentially middle-class image and sub-culture, even if it calls for hard work and the giving up of cherished comfort.
 - *that may well mean we have to try things that won't work out!*
 - *that may well mean we have to try things that feel uncomfortable to us, because we spend so much time inside the church and have lost touch to a degree with those who are on the road to hell*

Peter as God's Diamond Edged Blade!

- Peter was changed by his encounter with the crucified Christ
- Peter was filled and empowered by God's Spirit.
- Peter was used by God in many ways
- **But Peter didn't do everything:**

- he wasn't a Paul, a theologian, church planter, letter writer
- He still made mistakes:
 - table fellowship issue at Galatia
- Peter was still an ordinary punter, an uneducated fisherman
 - but one used and shaped by God for his service!

- We can be too - we too can be used by God, simply by being ourselves and allowing God to shape us, to transform us (by the renewing of our mind), to use the gifts and abilities he has already given us.

- May we allow God to use even us as his diamond edged tools in reaching this generation and building up his church today.