

7.23.23 Sermon

Remember Who You Are | John 21:15-19

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

peter, jesus, called, lion king, ran, simon, john, disciples, mufasa, people, ai, remember, love, text, key, timon, told, rock, life, word

SPEAKERS

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Good morning. As he said, I am the indomitable Sandra, and a Reverend, I sometimes still think I'm an intern.

Does anybody like Disney movies? Besides Britney and Sharon, they don't count. What's your favorite Disney movie? You can just yell it out.

Little Mermaid, Aladdin, I love these suggestions. Why don't you tell me your favorites? Well, my favorite Disney movie is The Lion King because, to me, it carries a deeper meaning. The movie just starts off so beautifully. Can anyone remember how it starts?

See, I was going to ask you all to recall it, much like what Joe just did automatically. Let me continue. At first, I was a little worried about this talk. Then I saw Brittany on Tuesday, and guess what she had on? A Lion King shirt. I told her she's a Disney fanatic. It had 'Hakuna Matata' printed on it, and I said to myself, "You know what, I've got no worries about this sermon. This is destiny. Destiny indeed."

I appreciate that. The movie started off with such an uplifting spirit. After hearing that song, I was convinced that it was going to be a good movie. However, just like the course of this sermon, everything was going great in the movie. We were singing and dancing, having a good time until this one particular scene changed the whole trajectory of the film.

Remember the scene where Scar pushes Mufasa off the cliff? It was the worst thing ever. This movie came out when I was eight years old. So, it was the first time that I had ever considered the mortality of my parents. I went from singing and dancing to thinking, "What just

happened?" Simba's running around calling for help, and I thought, "Wow, this is so depressing."

From there, it all went downhill. I was deeply affected by the scene where Scar confronts Simba. Simba says, "I didn't mean for this to happen," and Scar responds with, "What would your mother say?" It was a significant moment in the film and, for me, a significant moment in my young life.

He's like filling Simba with all this condemnation and shame." And someone's like, "What should I do?" He replies, "Run, run away and never return." So that's what somebody does. He runs away and finds himself in this desert. I thought he was dead, he ran so far that he couldn't run anymore. And that's where we find Timon and Pumba.

They come upon him and they teach him about this new place. He's eating new things and becoming a new person. They introduce him to Hakuna Matata and tell him it means "don't worry." So, he has no worries in this new place. He grows up and we see that he's living a good life.

Years later, Nala comes back on the scene, and she's like, "Hey, man, you need to come back. I'm glad you're alive. You need to come back and be king. That's your spot." And he's like, "No, you don't know what I did. I can't go back there." So, she's not convincing him at all to come back. He's like, "No, I can't tell you the story, but I can't go back there. I have a lot of pasts."

So, then we see Rafiki again, and he's being annoying. He's like, "I'll hit someone's face." And someone's like, "Man, who are you?" And he's like, "The question is, who are you?" So, someone's like, "I used to know, but I don't know anymore." He's like, "I know who you are. You're Mufasa's boy." And he's like, "My father." He's like, "Well, he said, you knew my father." He's like, "No, I know your father."

So, Simba was like, "Well, I hate to tell you, but he died." And he's like, "No, he's alive. I should take you to him." So, at this point, Simba's all excited. I'm excited. I'm like, "Man, has he been living another life?" So, we run through the woods, Simba gets hit by branches and stuff. And he calls it like a refuge, like, "Stop, look down here." And I'm like, "Okay, Mufasa is about to be down here." He shows him this river and he's looking at his reflection.

He's like, "Man, that ain't my dad. It's just my reflection." And Rafiki is like, "No." And he's like, "You will see this transformation," and Mufasa comes out of the sky, and he's like, "Simba, you have forgotten me." And Simba's like, "Nah, man, how can I forget you?" And he's like, "You've forgotten who you are. So, you have forgotten me."

So, then he tells him that he must look inside himself, "Simba, you are more than what you have become. You must take your place in the great circle of life." Simba's like, "How can I go back? I'm not who I used to be." Mufasa just says, "Remember who you are. You are my son, the one true King. Remember who you are." And then Simba's crying and saying, "Don't leave me. Don't leave me."

Now that we've spun up on The Lion King today, I want you to keep that imagery in your head as we journey to the book of John, chapter 21, verses 15 through 19. When they have finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "You know I love you."

Jesus once said, "Feed my lambs." Again, Jesus asked, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus responded, "Take care of my sheep."

For the third time, he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He replied, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. Verily, truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you dressed yourself and went where you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not wish to go."

Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then He said to him, "Follow me." After reading these words, the question arises: who is Peter? By no means is Peter an insignificant figure.

Peter is one who denied Christ not once, not twice, but three times. He was a disciple, indeed. Upon first reading this passage, it may not seem significant. I confess, when I got this text, I read through it thinking, "This isn't anything important." That's usually my process. I read a text, reflect on it, and sometimes, I even throw my phone or close my book in frustration, thinking, "This doesn't make any sense."

That's how I felt about this passage at first, to the point where I said to myself, "Nothing in this text makes sense to me." It felt like someone was talking over my head. But I had to come back to it, pray fervently, and try again. And when I did, something struck me about the phrase "Simon, son of John". It seemed to jump out at me, and I realized that Jesus was pointing out something crucial in His own mysterious way.

Have you ever noticed how your name changes based on situations or people? When I was a kid, in my family, I was called 'Monie'. But sometimes, my dad would call out my full name, 'Saundra Anderson', and that's when I knew that something serious was going on. Just like in my situation, Peter had different names based on different situations, revealing different aspects of his relationship with Christ. This is what this scripture reveals to us, and why it is worth revisiting and understanding.

You know, it isn't like a sweetheart or a Billy Bob winning plan. Something feels different. Just as if we're significant others, you've likely noticed a shift from terms of endearment such as 'babe' and 'sweetheart' to something else entirely.

Take, for example, your first name. Or perhaps Tony. You might even be referred to as a reverend, or a doctor. Something just feels so wrong when people start calling you by your previous name as opposed to what they've grown accustomed to. That's how I feel at this moment.

Jesus, for instance, addresses Simon, the son of John, not as Peter. Being petty is a habit I too possess, as I do the same thing. Sometimes, it gives me a strange satisfaction to be petty. But let's revert our attention to John Warren versus 42. I'm certain you remember that. Pastor Tracy preached about it in 1994 when *The Lion King* was released.

Fast forward to March 2021, a significant amount of time has passed since then. This showcases how long we've been immersed in the Book of John.

Now, Andrew, Peter's brother, introduces him to Jesus. Upon looking at him, Jesus declares, "You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas," which was translated as Peter. John, in his characteristic attention to detail, is the only one who documents this name change in the gospel.

So, why is this significant? It's because when Jesus looks at Peter, he outlines both his past and future in the same breath. The name change wasn't random or to simplify matters. The Hebrew meaning of Cephas, or Peter, is 'rock'. Jesus, at this moment, gives him a purpose. Simon, son of John, was merely a fisherman, but Peter is called to be a fisher of men. The change in occupation also signifies a change in destiny. Jesus takes Peter back to his roots, no longer addressing him as Peter, the name Jesus himself bestowed upon him. Remember how last week's text mentioned Peter reverting to his previous occupation, fishing, before he met Jesus? Admittedly, he wasn't doing well. He was just catching seaweed, not really netting any fish. Going back wasn't beneficial at all.

Until now, I didn't fully comprehend that denial was more than just saying, "I don't know you." I used to approach this text lightly, presuming that Peter was simply scared, saying, "I don't know you," to avoid trouble. However, the word 'denial' in Greek implies refusing to acknowledge someone's identity or even their existence. In this light, how can Peter be a disciple when he refuses to acknowledge Jesus's identity or existence?

The term "to renounce" essentially signifies formally declaring one's abandonment. It is the act of giving up or resigning by formal declaration. In this context, Peter's denial of Jesus wasn't simply a casual dismissal; he was formally declaring his abandonment. He refused to acknowledge Jesus' existence or his identity as the Messiah. He wanted no association with this man.

This intense reaction of Peter might be surprising to some. According to Matthew and Mark, Peter got so agitated that he began cursing and swearing. He was not merely upset, he was furious. Reading this text, one might be compelled to say, "Calm down, Peter." He seemed to be making an exaggerated point about not knowing Jesus.

The phrase used, about cursing and swearing an oath, reminds me of the familiar saying, "If I'm lying, may God strike me down." This phrase used to hold significant meaning. Peter, in his anger, probably echoed such a sentiment, knowing he was lying. Nowadays, when people say something akin to this, it often feels insincere, a mere theatrical expression of anger.

Peter found himself in a troubling situation. He loved Jesus, who was now in debt. Though it wasn't entirely his fault, he felt he played a part in it. Imagine Peter, living with this guilt for three days. He realized what he did on his third denial, and he wilted. It's a chilling image to hold in your mind, knowing that you've denied someone you once declared you'd never desert, not once but three times. On the third time, Peter had to look at Jesus in the face. The guilt, the shame, the self-condemnation must have been overwhelming.

In Matthew 16, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say I am?" and then, "Who do you say I am?" Peter's answer was clear, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus responded, "You are blessed, Simon, son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being." Jesus then went on to tell Peter that he is a rock on which He will build His church. He promised him the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

In this context, Jesus distinguished between "Simon, son of John" and "Peter". He seemed to indicate that Simon doesn't hold the same significance as Peter. Simon, the fisherman, was not the one Jesus called to build his church; it was Peter. However, when Peter denied Jesus,

he reverted to being Simon, someone God hadn't called him to be anymore. This regression prevented the fulfillment of God's promise in his life.

The situation mirrors the scene in *The Lion King*, where Mufasa shows Simba all the lands, saying, "Everything the light touches is yours." Jesus did something similar for Peter, promising him the keys to the kingdom. However, just as Simba ran away and lost his claim to the lands, Peter did the same. He lost his access to the promised blessings not because Jesus retracted his promise, but because Peter chose to flee. When someone gives you the key to something they own, it signifies trust. You don't give just anyone the keys to your house, car, or other valuable assets. Jesus offered Peter the keys to His entire kingdom.

Does anybody you know have exes or something, people that still have access to your house or access to your keys? People you don't talk to still have the power to call you. So, when Peter denounced him, it's like asking, "Why would he still feel entitled to have access when you denounce me?" Jesus is like, "I want to fix that for you. Because I still want this for you."

Just like we talked about in the topic of reckless love, Jesus isn't holding that against Peter. He comes to Peter and says, "I have to fix this for you." Mark earns some extra credit here because he is the only one who records this in his gospel. Mark says, "You are looking for Jesus, but he is risen. Go tell the disciples and Peter."

I love this because a bit of it was petty. To me, it seemed a little petty to single out "the disciples and Peter." But it was also profound that Jesus was saying, "Although you may feel like you're not a disciple anymore, I'm still going to call you by name. You're still invited. I want you to know that I have risen, too, because I still have a purpose for you."

He took this time to restore Peter. After he found Peter fishing, he called him back to have a conversation with him. He asked Peter, "Do you love me?" three times, mirroring the three times Peter had denied Him. The aim was to restore him. He didn't hang the shame or condemnation over Peter. Instead, He simply asked, "Do you love me?"

Peter replied, "I love you." Jesus then invited him into a new role. Not just as a fisherman, but as a shepherd, implying a greater purpose. There was never a conversation of "Do you remember what you did?" or "Do you remember saying you didn't know me?" Jesus extended his love and acceptance, asking "Do you love me?" This was the test He presented, offering Peter a chance to reconcile their relationship.

So, where or who have you allowed to chase you away from your rightful place in the kingdom? Who has filled you with shame, guilt, and condemnation? Have you forgotten your Father because you've forgotten yourself? Have you forgotten who you are? Even 2023 years

later, the gates of hell have not prevailed against the church because Peter was that rock. Prophecy was fulfilled.

I think about the people I know, even here in this church, who have shared their stories. Stories of when they used to work with the children until someone drove them away. To them, Jesus is saying, "Do you love me? Teach my children." I think of people who confessed they used to paint but lost their passion. To them, Jesus is saying, "Do you love me? Pick up the paintbrush again."

Remember the individuals who used to play drums before someone chased them off? To them, Jesus is saying, "Do you love me? Play the drums, sing the song. Be who you are." Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world but so that through Him, the world might be saved. Jesus does not bring shame and condemnation.

Think back to 2019 when I first visited here, and I found myself in a place where I felt like people had driven me away. They had chased me away from the church, away from my family. I clearly heard Jesus say to me, "You've made a good life as a soldier. You're doing well. You have your own life. But I have something better for you. Will you trust me for more?" Just like someone who is living a good life, doing well, I wasn't fulfilling what I was called to do. I had forgotten who God had called me to be. I was merely living life.

Are you living by the name Simon, son of John, when God has called you to be a Peter? Just think, if Peter had continued to be a fisherman we wouldn't have the church now, 2023 years later, if he had continued to veer away from whom God had called him to be. Your life is important. What you do is important. It impacts everyone, much like the metaphorical circle of life.

Everyone has their own place in this circle of life, and what you do and who you are matters. If I had just stayed in that place, would I be standing before you now, four years later, as an elder and an ordained minister? I doubted because people told me no and I ran from it.

Just like Peter, God restored that relationship. He called me and I answered, affirming, "Yes, I love you. Yes, I will feed your sheep." So, what is God calling you to? Where can you return, claim your rightful place, and receive your keys to the kingdom?

Everything the light touches is yours. Be cautious of shadowy places and strive to avoid them. Remember, God has not left us. Anytime you think that he has, look in a mirror. Just like he stated last week, he lives in you. He loved us so much that he gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit to always live within us.

Never feel alone. Find your place in his great circle of life and remember who you are.