

Empire Church of the Brethren

## *Sunday Service Sermons*

**26 March 2023**

Detached Contact

One of my favorite movies is "The Hallelujah Trail".

It is a funny western about Indians and alcohol and moving the alcohol from Julesburg To Denver Colorado before the winter sets in.

The Temperance movement is also part of this tale.

The miners in Denver, and the native Indians want the booze and the ladies of the Temperance Movement want to stop it.

The army commander wants to keep the peace so he decided to follow at a distance.

He comes up with the term, "Detached Contact" for the operation.

To be there but not really be there.

This is what the disciples do as Jesus is arrested and crucified.

They want to know what is going on but they do not want to be a part of it.

They do not want to experience what Jesus is experiencing.

They want to know but not do.

No one wants to experience what Jesus is experiencing as he is arrested, beaten and killed for disrupting the normal with the truth.

"Peter followed at a distance. But when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them." *Luke 22*

When we see an apparently strong Christian face a spiritual defeat, we tend to think, I would have expected that to happen to anyone but them.

Peter's denial, while keeping warm at the enemy's fire, creates a similar surprise.

Peter was a strong individual, a great leader, and a dynamic Christian.

Peter, a person of strength.

Strength of leadership.

Whenever the disciples are listed, Peter's name comes first, reflecting the disciple's view of his leadership.

Peter was one of the inner circle of disciples privileged to share in special experiences with Jesus, such as the transfiguration.

On the day of Pentecost, it was Peter who stood to preach.

Strength of spirit.

Peter did not have a timid spirit.

He was a bold spiritual adventurer.

Once he tried to walk on water, and later he ran to the tomb of Jesus.

Strength of body.

As a fisherman, Peter had developed his muscles by rowing boats and casting heavy nets.

He showed his physical strength in the garden; he was strong enough to take on the entire mob.

In spite of all these qualities, Peter denied the Lord. "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall!" *1 Cor. 10.*

No Christian is immune from the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Peter: vulnerable to sin.

Blind to weakness.

Peter, a typical human, had strengths and weaknesses but he seemed to be blind to his weaknesses.

Peter confidently told the Lord, " I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." *Luke 22*

This was a noble expression and a wonderful assurance, apparently uttered in ignorance of his

fleshly potential for succumbing to sin's temptation.

Victor Hugo wrote, "I feel two men struggling within me".

The apostle Paul also had a realistic view of the tension between good and evil that rages in every soul: "For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do, this I keep doing. . . . I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" *Rom. 7*

Satan attacks the vulnerable spot.

Jesus warned Peter of Satan's impending attack: "Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat." *Luke 22*

The evil one caught the strong disciple in a vulnerable moment, surrounded by the enemy and separated from the other disciples.

He will sift us until he finds the most vulnerable place at which to hurl his temptation.

"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the ruler, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" *Eph 6*

Jesus taught us to pray for deliverance from the evil one.

We say with Paul, "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" *Rom. 7*

Peter: the pressure to conform.

The pressure of men.

What was the vulnerable spot for Peter?

He let himself be guided by those around him.

Is this entirely wrong?

A healthy concern for what others think is an asset.

But Peter went beyond this concern and allowed his actions to be molded by those around him.

A dialogue between Jesus and Peter recorded in Matthew 16 illustrates this peer pressure.

Jesus was talking about his coming rejection and death when Peter strongly reacted: "Never, Lord! . . . This shall never happen to you!"

Peter's concept of the Messiah did not include Jesus as the Suffering Servant.

Instead, Peter subscribed to the popular concept of the victorious Messiah conquering the Romans and reestablishing the throne of David.

Jesus rebuked him: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Peter again exhibited a tendency to reflect the prevailing social pressure on a later occasion, which Paul described in *Galatians 2*.

"Before certain men came from James, Peter used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group."

Peter knew the Lord was no respecter of persons, but he was afraid to resist the pressure of a strong group in the church.

Peter was a strong man but not strong enough to stand against the values of immature Christians, even though they were against God.

The pleasure of God.

What are we to do in the face of compromising peer pressure?

Paul expresses what is pleasing to God: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will." *Rom. 12*

In the mid-1800s, two distinguished statesmen delivered addresses before a British university. Benjamin Disraeli said, "If you would succeed, know the temper and spirit of the times in which you live and act accordingly."

William Gladstone said, "Do not drift with the age. Have fixed principles and stand by them."

At the enemy's campfire, Peter did drift with the age and lived to regret it.

In the days following the resurrection of Jesus, some of the disciples had breakfast with the Lord beside the Sea of Galilee.

Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him and then told Peter he would have to suffer for him.

Peter pointed to John and asked, "Lord, what about him? Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.'"

The tension was still present; it was still difficult for Peter to face God's will.

The same crucial question that confronted Peter confronts us as well: "What will you do with Christ?"

You can't pass the decision off to someone else.

You must decide.

The pressure of others offers convenient options,

The warmth of the enemy's fire is appealing.

May the Lord hear us say, "Yes, I know Jesus, he is my Lord!"

And he will save me from sin and death.

Now and forever more.