(Please know this is my message however, I tend not to stick exactly to my script ☺)

WHY PETER?
By Ann Burnham

As you know this week, we begin the church wide Lenten study of Simon Peter. I love the title, Flawed but Faithful Disciple, because it describes so many of us.

As my husband and I were walking along the beach last Sunday I was looking at the waves and the rocks, truly trying to imagine Simon (as he was originally called). I thought about him fishing all night long and not being happy because he had caught no fish. He and his brother Andrew as well as James and John (Sons of Zebedee), and their crews were probably tired and frustrated. Catching fish was not a pastime for them, it was the way they made their living. Now they had come in to wash and mend their nets. Jesus had been on the shore teaching the word of God to a large number of people. The people were crowding around Jesus, so Jesus asked Simon to row out a bit so that he could sit and teach people from the boat. This made sense because people could still hear Jesus, but he could see them without them pressing in on him.

After Jesus was done, he asked Simon Peter to go way out into the deep water and drop his nets again. If I were Simon Peter, my first thought would have been, are you kidding me? I just got through washing my nets and cleaning them so they're ready for tomorrow night and you want me to go and drop them again? I am tired! There weren't any fish all night and exactly how will there be fish now? Simon's response however, is far more polite, but you can tell his heart was not in it, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets".

Now we know from John 1, that this was not the first time Simon and his brother Andrew had seen Jesus. Several weeks earlier, the brothers had gone to hear John the Baptist preach and when Andrew heard John refer to Jesus as the "Lamb of God" he went to get Simon because he believed they had found the Messiah. Maybe this is why Simon did as Jesus asked.

But of course, we know that when Simon and Andrew went out and dropped their nets, they hit the motherload of fish! Luke 5 tells us Simon called their partners, James and John to help and the two boats almost sank because they had so many fish. Simon was so overwhelmed that he dropped to his knees and told Jesus to go away, he said "because Simon knew he was a sinful man". Simon was not thinking about how much this would help him financially, or how the other fishermen would look at him with envy, instead Simon was most likely awestruck by this miracle. He knew that Jesus had healed the sick and driven out demons but why would he bother with Simon and his needs? Simon probably thought, "I am no one and yet this man of greatness is paying attention to me?" Why would Jesus bless him with this abundance?

I can understand that feeling. I think there are times when we do not feel worthy, especially when someone does something really nice for us. It can make us feel almost uncomfortable, and that is why Simon dropped to his knees. He was probably thinking, "Oh boy, you do not know what kind of man I have been, definitely not the kind of man who deserves a miracle like this!" But I believe Jesus knew what kind of man Simon was just like He knows what kind of flawed people we are.

I love story of Simon Peter because it gives me hope and understanding. In John 1:42 when Jesus first met Simon, He said, "You are Simon son of John, you will be called Cephas", which is Aramaic for Peter but in Greek, the name of Peter is Petros which means stone or rock. When I hear that name, "rock", I think of strength, someone who cannot be swayed but will hold fast. My grandfather, who came here from Greece, used to tell me not to be weak. He would say, "When I was a boy, I would pick up a piece of marble, squeeze it and get milk!" I think I was 14 before I figured out that wasn't true!

You might wonder why Jesus would consider Peter a "rock". I mean we have all heard the story of Jesus walking on the water in Matthew 14, when Peter challenges Jesus, saying, "Lord, if it is you, order me to come to you on the water". This is the guy who is a rock but obviously he doubted it was Jesus walking on the water but Jesus commands Peter to come to him and Peter must have felt kind of full of himself at first because he starts to walk towards Jesus, but the wind blows and the waves get

rough, so Peter loses faith and starts sinking, yelling to Jesus to save him – a rock, really? I think not!

We read in Mark at the Passover Supper, Jesus tells the disciples, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered." But Peter replies, "Even if all fall away, I will not". Oh, he is so sure that he will indeed be a rock, but Jesus knows better. He tells Peter, "today – yes, tonight - before the rooster crows twice, you yourself will disown me three times". But Peter is still so sure of himself, that he insists, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." I am sure Peter did not believe he would do such a thing and was probably hurt that Jesus said this to him. After all, would a "rock" do that?

But what happened? When Jesus was arrested and led away to the house of the high priest, Peter followed but he kept back a distance. Then a servant girl saw Peter seated by the fire light and she said, "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus" but Peter denied it saying, "I don't know or understand what you're talking about.". He walked away but later she saw him again and said to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them", but again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." Peter started to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I do not know this man you are talking about." Just then the rooster crowed the second time. Peter knew what Jesus said had come true. Luke 22:62 tells us Peter "went outside and wept bitterly". Can you imagine his shame – his self-loathing? I am sure Peter *wanted* to be brave, he *wanted* to stand strong, but he was weak and certainly no rock. Peter sank like a rock in that deep water.

My Mom and Dad grew up in Lynn not far from Lynn Beach. The went to the beach all the time and loved the water but I remember the first time they took me to a lake. The whole family went – cousins, aunts and uncles, and we were all swimming and splashing each other. My Mom was swimming out a bit (probably to get away from me splashing her) when my Dad yelled, "Franny, you are out kind of far, you're over your head". She looked back smiling, then tried to touch her toes in the sand but when she could not, she started thrashing and sinking! Dad and my uncle had to swim out and save her. I learned then that my mom would swim

beautifully as long as her toes could touch bottom, but as soon as she could not feel the bottom – she panicked and sank!

Isn't that how many of us are? When everything is fine, we are posting pictures on Facebook and saying how blessed we are but let there be something terrible and you hear, "How could God let that happen?" "Why did this happen to me, how could God do this?" It is tough out there in the deep water, but there are those among us who show unbelievable faith and courage.

I remember the first really horrific school shooting we heard about was in Columbine, Colorado. The Columbine killers were students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. They knew that Rachel Joy Scott, 17, was a Christian. Moments before her death, they asked her, "Do you still believe in your God?" With a gun at her head Scott replied, "You know that I do", and they killed her. Some have doubted that story but Craig Scott, Rachel's brother, says the conversation between the killers and his sister rings true to him because he witnessed a similar exchange in the library. He saw firsthand that a girl who simply said, 'Oh God,' caught the killers' attention. Craig said, "She was crying and begging for her life. Harris and Klebold asked her four times if she believed in God, and finally she said yes, and that's when they shot her. Her name was Val Schnur." He said he knew how brave it was for his sister to say yes. I don't know about you, but I want to believe that I would be that courageous. I am sure Simon Peter wanted to be that courageous, but he was not.

What we do know and what gives us hope is that Jesus forgives us despite our flaws, he loves us anyway. Even after being denied, Jesus reinstated Peter as we see in John 21. Once again, Peter is fishing with the other disciples. They are catching nothing when a man appears on the shore. He calls to Peter and the other disciples and asks, "Children, have you caught any fish?" They reply that they have not, and the man says, "throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some". When they did that, they were unable to haul the net in to the boat because it was so heavy. Then one of the disciples who Jesus loved, said to Peter, it is the Lord! As soon as Simon Peter heard him say that he jumped into the water swimming toward Jesus and the other disciples followed in the boat towing

the net full of fish. Jesus told them to bring some of the fish that they had caught so that they could cook it and they could talk.

When they finished eating Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," said Peter, "you know that I love you." Then Jesus said, Feed my lambs." Again, Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" Again, Simon Peter answered, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed because he felt that the Lord didn't believe that he truly loved Him. Peter replies, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you." Jesus again replies, "Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, 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 want to go." Then Jesus said to him, "Follow me!"

There are messages in this exchange. Three times Peter denied the Lord and three times the Bible tells us that Jesus, after being crucified and resurrected, returns to ask Peter if he truly loves him. Peter needs to negate the triple denial with a triple affirmation of his love. The love Jesus is speaking of is not just a regular "love ya" kind of love but a deep agape love. This type of deep love is a selfless love and places someone else's needs and concerns above your own.

We know then Peter did become a rock and built the church, worked unbelievably hard, and was martyred for his faith. Jesus knew something that Peter did not know – he saw strength that Peter did not know he had. He knew Peter would falter but that Peter would develop a deeper and stronger sense of faith than ever before. Jesus knew that Peter's failures would make him a strong disciple. Who would have expected Peter to become a rock-solid example preaching and teaching humility, love and hope, and encouraging respect and submission to authority? Peter truly went from the shallow water to the very deep water.

Remember our God created all the waters - the still waters to comfort us, but He also created the deep waters to test and strengthen us. That is what we need to take away from Simon Peter and his shortcomings. We also have shortcomings and we may be afraid when our toes cannot touch bottom, but it is through trials and failures, that we will find our strength

and resolve. It is in those times that we need to pray and read Scripture. We can and will grow stronger to become the true deep-water Christians Jesus wants us to be. Yes, we stumble and fall. Yes, we make mistakes and we sin but despite it all, Jesus forgives and loves us. He blesses us continually so we must never lose our faith.