

Pastor, He will never change. He always does stuff, only if it is advantageous to him. Self-centered is his middle name. Pastor, she is out there helping and having fun with others, but has no time for me". Pastor, he continues to drink. He is abusive and angry when he drinks. Our family finances are a disaster. He won't change." Pastor, "I am depressed most of the time. I have these health problems that won't get better. I wonder why I am even here yet".

A couple of thousand of years ago, I might have heard someone talking about a particular person named Peter in the same way. "Pastor, Peter has an ego that won't quit. He thinks he is better than anyone else. He is impulsive. He does things without thinking first. He chopped off the High priest's servants ear with his sword in the Garden of Eden. Then too, he is the type of person when he faces any type of ridicule for this faith, clams up, and denies he never knew Jesus Christ. He goes around and acts like an unbeliever. The guy is a hypocrite." This guy will never change.

All through life we run into people, who turn us off in one way or another. They have habits or actions which are highly offensive. We have the attitude. Once a jerk, always a jerk. That person will never change. But I tend to disagree with you on that one. Everyone can change, and change for the better. When you have a run-in with the Risen Savior Jesus Christ and his abiding presence in God's Word, you can indeed become a new man, a new person. You can face prison, sickness, tough character flaws, that can be overcome for the better. Today, we have a message of hope for all you negative vibe people. Let's look at the theme: "Chained but Changed for the Better!"

Reading the book of Acts in the Bible can make you glad to live where you do today. In almost every chapter you read about a new trial or tribulation that the infant church endured. Can you imagine what it would be like to have a raid on Trinity this morning by a squad of special operations officers, who would push you to the ground, cuff you, and take you to Standish prison in several different paddy wagons.. Finally, they found a use for Standish prison, and it is to gather up Christians, torture them, and execute them. In our story for today, King Herod was arresting Christians in Jerusalem, in order to persecute them. In fact, he recently, had James, one of the sons of Thunder, a member of Jesus' inner circle, put to death by having his head chopped off with a sword.

About 15 years after Jesus' arrest and death King Herod arrested Peter. In fact, his plan was to kill him on the anniversary of Jesus' death. We don't know if that was intentional but it surely sends shivers down the spine. Herod wasn't taking any chances with his homicidal plan. He remembered that years before the apostles had all escaped from prison after the Sanhedrin arrested them. He assigned four squads of four soldiers each to guard this one man, working 6 hour shifts. He put him in a locked cell and chained his hands to two guards. The next morning Peter would be executed.

Did you catch what may be the most surprising part of this story? Peter was sleeping. Who of us could sleep the night before our execution, chained to two guards? How could Peter do so?

The resurrection of Christ from the dead had made a new person out of Peter. He was truly at peace with God. Jesus had met him early on Easter Sunday morning assuring him that he was forgiven for all the mess-ups he had done in his life. Jesus had reassured Peter and the other disciples that Peter was indeed apostle. Peter was changed. He was humble, and not impulsive. He was not overwhelmed with guilt for what he had done to Christ. The power of God's Word had enlightened Peter over time as he continually found Jesus' presence with him. So instead of worrying and wailing, Peter is simply ready for whatever the Lord of history has in mind for

him. Peter had no doubt said his many prayers, but was now laying things in God's hands, waiting for him to do what was best. And so, he sleeps.

What causes you to lose sleep at night? What keeps you from resting peacefully? In many cases it is physical ailments that make us restless, but more often it's the things that weigh on our minds that keep us awake. Thinking about the child away at college, or the teen battling through high school. Concerned about the parent who is not doing as well as we would like. Nervous over your finances. Stressed over work. On edge because of marital issues. Worried of potential job loss. Questions that just aren't easily answered. Problems with no quick solution. And the worst one of all, guilt over sin.

Our first reaction is to try and be like the old Peter. That we ourselves can solve everything on our own. If we can just react quickly enough, make just the right decision, work hard enough and think long enough; then all these problems will go away. And if that doesn't work, then we can play the blame game. Casting fault upon whomever is most convenient at the time. Your boss, your spouse, your kids, your teacher, the government, the world. It makes us feel better for a very short time. But the problems have not been solved, and our fitful sleep remains the same.

Sadly enough, the answer is right there in front of us, no more difficult than opening up the good book to read and opening our mouths to pray. We just need to give it to the one who can actually do something about it. But too often we don't, because we don't want to. We feel like a failure if we do, that somehow we have failed as Christians if we any kind of problems at all. Our pride doesn't want to admit that we have made mistakes along the way, that we have played a part in whatever troubles we have.

So strongly do we want to preserve whatever distorted image that we have of ourselves that we will even go so far as to blame God. But the only failure is on us. We know that we ought to read the Word and pray to God. We know that we ought to cast all our cares on him, to place all our troubles and worries into his hands. And when we don't, when we refuse to do so, we are casting aside God's promises of care and comfort whenever we need it. We are telling God we don't need or want his help. That's rejection of the lowest order. That's turning away from God and into sin.

I can't help but think of a conversation that Peter and Jesus had with one another after the resurrection. No doubt Peter was still troubled by his rejection of Christ on Maundy Thursday evening. Jesus wants to set him straight, to release him from his guilt. Three times he asks Peter, "Do you love me?" In the past Peter would have boasted about how great his love was for the Lord. But here he is humble, saying each time, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love you."

This was Jesus' way of showing Peter that everything was okay. Because he was showing Peter that His death and resurrection changes everything. Peter wasn't acting different now because he felt guilty, he was suddenly humble because he was saved. After having witnessed firsthand the Christ sacrifice himself for sins such as his rejection, and then come back from that showering them with blessings and peace, Peter now saw that there was nowhere else to look but at Jesus. Everything rested on him. Everything was done by him. That made Peter forgiven and freed him to serve, no matter the circumstances. That's what allowed him to be so willing to trust even in the harshest of situations.

Jesus does not test us with that hard question, "Do you love me?" Rather, the only question he wants us to ask is, "Does Jesus love me?" Well...does he? Yes. A thousand times yes. A billion times yes. Look to the cross and see the Son of God shed his blood. That's his love, cleansing you from all your failures to trust in him. Look to the empty tomb and see that he

is no longer dead. You have a risen Savior who will help you with your impossible situation. He loves to take an impossible situation and make it possible. That's his love, guaranteeing that you will have a place in heaven because you are now holy in his sight. Look to the Word where he gives us this truth in so many beautiful ways. Look to your life, where his Father watches over you day and night and gives you everything that you need. Jesus loves you, and he is with you.

So we can be as calm and relaxed and serene as Peter was. Yes, we can finally get some sleep. Because it's the same Savior who changed Peter that also changes us. It's the same message that comforted Peter that also brings us peace. It's the same power that could do such an amazing thing in Peter that also does amazing things in us. Jesus is the one who declares us not guilty. Jesus is the one who rules heaven and earth. And Jesus is the one who promises to take care of us in every way, shape and form.

So what do you fear? What pains you? What worries you? Take it to Jesus in prayer. Did you see the power of prayer in this lesson? Prayer changes things. Put it in his hands and let go. Then hold fast to the Word and to the risen and ruling Christ in it. It doesn't matter what may happen in your life, it doesn't matter how rough it may seem. Jesus, your brother and friend and Savior is risen and rules. He will not forsake you, but remains with you through his Word. He rules all of history, all of the world, all of mankind for the benefit of the Church. For the benefit of you. Whatever is in your best interest, that is what he permits, that is what he sends. Every time, without fail it is all for our good.

So trust in the Lord and lean not on your own understanding. If the Lord can send an angel to deliver a man chained to 2 guards, and locked in a prison, He can deliver you from the chains that shackle you. You may be presently chained, but rest assured with the Risen Savior, you will be changed for the better!