

The Rev. Nadia Boles-Weber, pastor of the Church of All Sinners and Saints in Denver, Colorado, jokes that our gospel reading must have been redacted - or edited. Jesus didn't really say, "I say you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." What he really said is, "Peter, you are dumb as a rock!" No way could failing, pathetic Peter have been called the "rock" to build the church upon.

It seems like the gospels are full of Peter's mistakes and bungles. He walks on the water and then sinks. At the Transfiguration he offers to build three dwellings, one each for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. He refuses to let Jesus wash his feet but instead demands that Jesus wash all of him. And of course, Peter denies Jesus three times right before the crucifixion.

It is easy to pick on Peter, and call him dumb as a rock. Peter has been interpreted as a bungler for centuries. The thing is, when we honestly look at Peter, we discover that his interactions with Jesus are often logical and intelligent. I've preached before that at the Transfiguration Peter is actually

doing some pretty sophisticated theological thinking when he offers to make three dwellings. He is wrong, and laughably off the mark, but not speaking like a clueless idiot.

We find the same thing happening in our gospel reading today. Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they reply, "John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets." But then Jesus asks, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter replies, "You are the Messiah." He is absolutely right.

Now of course Peter's moment of fame quickly turns to a moment of shame. No sooner does this praise for Peter leave Jesus' lips than Peter is rebuking Jesus for teaching what being the Messiah really means. Jesus in turn rebukes Peter, the rock, and says, "Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

The thing is, here Peter's rebuke of Jesus makes perfect sense. Remember, Jesus is not the only Messiah we meet in the Bible. Messiah is the Hebrew word for "anointed one." Just like "Christ" is the Greek word for "anointed one." As Christians we have elevated Jesus above other messiahs in the

Bible, and that is perfectly okay, but for Peter to confess Jesus as the Messiah is insightful, yes, but not exactly earthshattering.

King Saul was called a messiah. He was the anointed king. King David was called a messiah. He also was anointed the king. Even King Cyrus of Persia, a pagan and a foreigner, is called the Lord's messiah.

Anyone who was designated by God to carry out a specific purpose in life could be called messiah or Christ. Peter here is recognizing Jesus as one such person. And that sets us up for why Peter later rebukes Jesus.

Jesus says that he must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed. This sounds like insane talk to Peter. How could the Lord's anointed be rejected and killed by the religious leaders God has put into place? It couldn't be. That's counter to what being the Lord's anointed really means.

I think Peter would have been okay with hearing that the religious leaders might not accept Jesus and his mission right away and there would be a struggle. But the idea of the Lord's anointed being killed by God's chosen leaders was just absurd. Yes, Jesus does say that he will rise again in three days. We know exactly what he means by that but Peter didn't. All he could hear was "be killed".

You see, Peter is actually speaking and thinking like a perfectly rational and logical person. It is Jesus who is talking nonsense. Let's not let our familiarity with this text let us get away with dismissing Peter as being dumb as a rock. He wasn't.

In fact, Peter is all too much like us - logical, thoughtful, trying to piece things together into a sensible picture. A psychologist would call that mental state "sanity." It is Jesus whose words sound insane.

As we laugh at Peter for his rapid fall from greatness we can't help but wonder how many of our well-thought-out intentions about God's will are similarly silly. Jesus'

teachings continue as he says, "If any want to become by followers let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and the sake of the gospel will save it."

If Peter thought Jesus was insane, or demon possessed, for saying that the religious leaders would reject and kill him this teaching went way too far. Remember, crucifixion was not just a very painful and shameful way to die. Crucifixion was a cursed way to die. If someone was crucified people saw it as proof that that person had been rejected by God. Now how could the Lord's anointed be cursed by God?

If we wonder why the disciples didn't get half of what Jesus taught, here's why. Stuff like this just made no sense. And so they chose to ignore it thinking Jesus was speaking some deep and mysterious truths. And, in fact, he was; although we who come after the crucifixion and resurrection get to understand completely.

Before the crucifixion they could see only from the human point of view - power, strength, success: Stay alive for as long as you possibly could. Have as much stuff and as many friends and as much control as you could. Make sure you keep your enemies at bay.

God's point of view is completely different. When a person's worth cannot be measured on a spreadsheet of strengths and weaknesses, when forgiveness for mistakes is real, and when death is not the end life and logic take on a completely different form.

Peter could only see life by what *he* could do. He could not see life by what *God* could do. That is what we are blessed to see. Jesus actions can make sense to us. We can't do it. But we have a God who can.

By God's grace we can see how taking up the cross and following Jesus is actually life affirming. When we realize the ironic truth that the more we give of ourselves and the more we love the more we become our true selves.

Hoarding possessions or money or power isn't growing. It is dying. Accomplishing your personal selfish agenda is actually accomplishing nothing. As Jesus says, you just end up dead all the same. You'd be better off trusting yourself to God's agenda and letting God accomplish something real with you along the way.

We are all weak, frail human beings prone to failure and sure to die. But we have a strong and mighty God who does not fail and who can save us from death. Let us set our minds on divine things so that we can truly live. Amen