

“Come”* – Matthew 4:18-22
The Chapel – Sept 2009

Today we are continuing in our new series called “Church in the Red.”

Now normally when something is in the red we don’t think of it as being a good thing, unless, of course, it’s a golf score. But, for the most part, we like things to be in the black – especially our financials, and especially the church financials. So, just so we’re clear, “Church in the Red” isn’t a series on stewardship. And our concern in this series isn’t with numbers – our concern is with letters and words – in particular the words spoken by Jesus often printed in red in many of your Bibles.



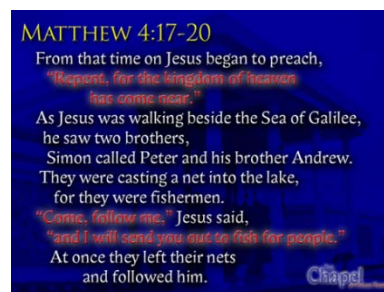
Today’s “red letter” words are the 4th chapter of Matthew, verses 18-22. Here’s what they say:

¹⁸As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

¹⁹“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them,

²²and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. (Matthew 4)



Several weeks ago, my wife and I received an invitation to a party that included some pretty big names – on the invitation list were names like Bill and Melinda Gates, communications mogul Bruce McCaw, Hollywood legend David Foster, and Seattle Artist Dale Chihuly. And I have to be honest, as much as I hate to admit it - it felt pretty cool to be on such an impressive invitation list.

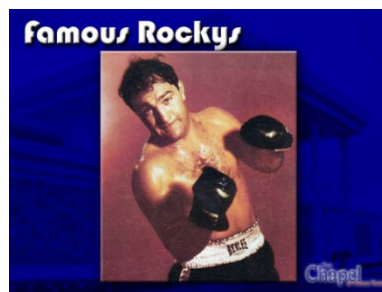
But as cool as that was – it really is nothing compared to the invitation we just read in these verses. Because in this story Jesus issues the greatest invitation anyone will ever receive. It’s the invitation to “Come” and follow him. And to respond to that invitation by saying “Yes” is the most life changing decision a person will ever make.

This morning, I want us to look at one of the men in this story and see how saying ‘Yes’ to Jesus transformed his life and changed his future.

And as a way of introducing you to this character, I want to start with a little quiz.

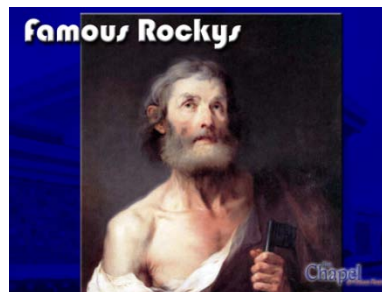
The category is: Famous Rockys. I'll show you the picture – you identify the Rocky.

- Marciano
- Squirrel – side kick to Bulwinkle
- Mountains
- Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone)



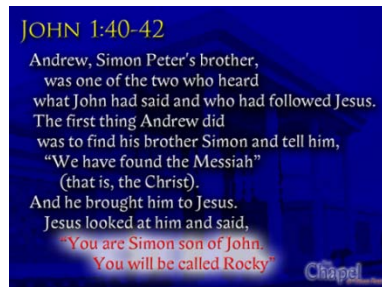
- The Apostle Peter aka 'Rocky'. He was probably the 1st Rocky. I'm not making this up.

I say this based on the account we just read and on the Apostle John's fuller account of the story from the first chapter of his Gospel.



Here's what he writes:

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother, Simon, and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is the 'Christ'). He immediately led him to Jesus.



Jesus tool one look up and said, "You're John's son, Simon? From now on your name is Cephas" [which when translated from the Aramaic into Greek is Peter and when translated into the common underlying noun is Rock, and when translated into everyday language is Rocky. "You will be called Rocky"] - John 1:40-42

There's a wonderful story I read a few years ago that I have always remembered because it played into a situation that was going on in my own family.

The story comes from Bruce Larson – the former pastor of University Presbyterian Church in Seattle. He writes about his 6yr old son – who for some unknown reason had begun sucking his thumb....and this bothered Bruce very deeply.

He tried everything he knew to get him to stop sucking his thumb, but nothing seemed to work. Finally, in sheer frustration he decided he would try to shame his son into stopping. So, he gave his son a nickname..."Thumbsucker."

Every time the little boys thumb went into his mouth - out came the nickname – 'Thumbsucker.' Now, some of you are parents – *how many of you think that nickname changed the boy's behavior?* Well, it did....it got worse.

And what had been a bright, happy, carefree little boy – became, now, a sad discouraged little boy who compulsively sucked his thumb. And without noticing it – over a period of time – the father’s attitude changed as well. His son, who had once been a source of joy to him, had become a source of irritation and frustration.

Larson writes that one day as he was praying – he sensed that God was speaking to him in that still small way he uses to prompt our hearts. And he sensed God asking him,

“Bruce, is this the little boy you prayed to have?”

“Well, yes, Lord”

“Are you happy with him?”

“Yes, Lord, I am.”

“Well, then, why are you calling him thumbsucker?”

Larson says, “I felt I had no answer to the question being prompted in my heart, but I knew right then what God wanted me to do.”

And he determined right then and there that he would give his son a new name.

So, he went out, found his son (sucking his thumb) – he picked him up and with a big smile said, “Hi, Mr. Wonderful!”

The boy, of course, registered no response at all. But, Larson says, “I never again called him ‘Thumbsucker’ – instead, I kept calling him Mr. Wonderful.”

Now, I’m not suggesting that this is the only prescription to thumb sucking problems. But, Larson said, it was only a matter of time until the thumb sucking stopped and the boy returned to being his normal, happy self.

Larson says what happened is that I had given my son the gift of a new identity.

That is exactly what happens to Peter in our story.

Jesus gives Peter the gift of a new identity.

Jesus saw in Peter something no one else could see.

And, in changing his name, Jesus allows Peter to see in himself an entirely new set of possibilities he had never seen before. You see, Jesus didn’t just change Peter’s name – he changed the way Peter saw himself – and in doing so, he changed his future!

(Because, remember, when you respond to Jesus’ invitation to ‘come’ – it changes everything!)

Now, to understand why Jesus changed Peter’s name we have to push the fast-forward button of our story ahead a few years. Because Peter said ‘yes’ to Jesus’ invitation – he would become a follower of Jesus and, as a result, the next few years would become the most incredible adventure of Peter’s life.

Peter was an eye witness to everything Jesus said and did. He was there when:

- Jesus fed 5,000 people from a tuna sandwich – he saw people raised from the dead – he saw paralytics walk and blind people receive their sight.

- He listened to Jesus talk about his Father – a God more gracious, loving, and personal than he ever imagined possible.

- Peter watched as Jesus' reputation began to grow – he saw Jesus interact with women and children and social outcasts with a dignity and respect no one else would give them.

And everyone wants to know who this man Jesus really is – it was the central question of the day (and, in fact, it remains the central question even to this day – Who is Jesus?).

So, one day as Jesus and his disciples are walking along – Jesus picks up on the buzz going on around this question. So he says to his disciples, **“There’s a lot of talk circulating around about who I am, ‘What are people saying?’**

And they answer, “You’re right Jesus – everyone is talking – some think your John come back from the dead, some say you’re Elijah or Jeremiah – and a lot of people just aren’t sure.”

Then Jesus starts to press them, **“What about you? Who do you say I am?”**

And it’s Peter who responds, “Why you’re the Christ – the Son of the Living God!”

And when Peter makes that public confession, Jesus says to him, **“You’re right – and now that you know who I really am, let me tell you who you are – who you REALLY are – YOU ARE PETER, A ROCK, AND ON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH!”**

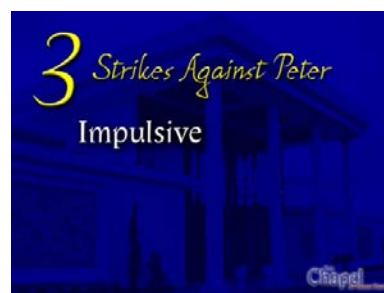
And now we’re beginning to understand why Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter – the Rock. Jesus is getting ready to establish his church and he’s now laying the foundation – and he looks at Peter and he says, **“You will become the first stone – the foundation on which I will build it.”**

Now – had I been there as an observer on the day Jesus first encountered Peter – I think I would have taken Jesus aside and said something like this: *“Uh, Jesus – I know you’re the Son of God and all – and that you’re not really prone to making mistakes or bad calls – but you could be making a mistake – a BIG mistake on this one. Obviously you don’t know this man like we do. If you’re looking for solid leadership, THIS is a bad idea...Simon Peter is not your man for the job.”*

And I think I would have some logical support for coming to that conclusion.

I can think of 3 things right off: **3 strikes against Peter**

1st – He’s Impulsive. He’s impetuous and he shouldn’t be called a Rock, because a rock conveys a stable-like personality – and that’s not Peter.



I mean, the whole purpose of a foundation stone is to bear weight – that’s why it’s there. And something that bears weight needs to be fixed and solid and unmoving. And that’s not Peter. Peter is NOT a rock.

He’s extremely impulsive and not the kind of person who should be in a leadership role. If you’re looking for a leader – you might want to consider someone who thinks through the options, not someone who flies off the handle!

Peter is too impulsive – and we have plenty of illustrations from his life to prove this:

1. Remember Peter’s answer to Jesus’ question in Matthew 16:15 “Who am I?” – and Peter says, “You’re the Christ, the son of the living God” – and everyone is all impressed “Wow, Peter, you’re really spiritual!”

So, Jesus goes on in the conversation in v21, “OK, now you know who I am – let me tell you why I’m here: We’re on our way to Jerusalem where I will be arrested, suffer, and die.”

Peter says, “No way! I won’t let that happen!”

So one moment Peter is saying, “You’re the Son of God” and 10 minutes later he’s saying “OK, even though you’re the Son of God, you really don’t know what you’re doing.” I’m smarter than God!

2. Later, when soldiers come to arrest Jesus – Peter pulls out a sword and starts swinging – he’s going to take on the whole Roman army! 2 hours later some servant girl identifies him as one of Jesus’ disciples and he’s cursing and swearing and denying that he even knows Jesus!

3. One of his classic impulsive moves is in John 21 – when after the crucifixion of Christ, Peter figures all is lost. He’s not sure if Jesus has risen from the dead or not – so, he decides to back to fishing. He’s been fishing all night, when at daybreak he hears a voice calling to him from shore – it’s Jesus!

And when Peter realizes that it’s Jesus – the Bible says that Peter stood up in the boat – put his on his coat – dove into the water and swam to shore. I submit to you – that is an impulsive act!

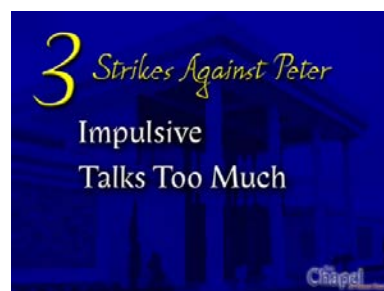
- First, if you’re going to swim – you don’t put your coat on/you take it off.

- Second, it is more customary to row to shore.

But Peter was impulsive. And I would have said to Jesus, “This man is not a rock!” So, strike one.

Strike 2 – is his mouth. He talks too much.

He had what one of my teachers used to say about me – “Vertefeuille, you have diarrhea of the mouth! Put a cork in it!” Another one told me once, “John, if you didn’t talk so much – I might think you were half-way intelligent.”

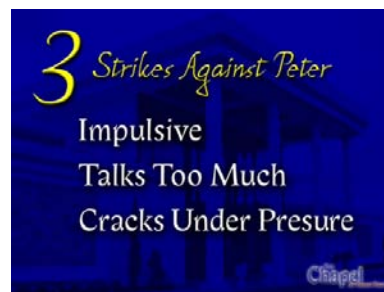


That was Peter – always talking and often saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. He talks without thinking – in fact, both Mark and Luke tell us as much. Peter is on a spiritual retreat with Jesus, when a voice speaks from heaven – God’s voice to be exact. Now usually when God speaks, it’s good to be quiet.

Not Peter. This is Mark’s account:

⁵Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶(He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) – Mark 9:6 In other words, Peter, not knowing what to say, says something. So, strike 2 – he talks too much.

Strike 3 – he cracks under pressure. We’ve already pointed out that on the night Jesus was arrested and taken away – Peter was standing by a fire trying to stay warm when a slave girl notices him and points him out as a follower of Jesus. And Peter goes Ballistic – cursing, swearing, and denying that he even knows Jesus.



Again, if you’re going to be a foundation stone – you’ve got to be able to hold up under pressure. Peter did not – he cracked under the pressure.

So, all of those fault lines were in Peter when Jesus called him a Rock.

And I would have said to Jesus, *“If you want to give him a nickname, fine. Call him ‘motor-mouth’, ‘weeny-boy’, anything – but don’t call him a Rock, because he’s not!”*

And that’s when Jesus would look at me and say, *“Well, that’s the problem with you. It’s what you do to others – it’s what you do to yourself – you seem to focus so much on everyone’s problems that you miss their potential. Why don’t you look for the potential – the possibilities in people’s lives instead of the problems?”*

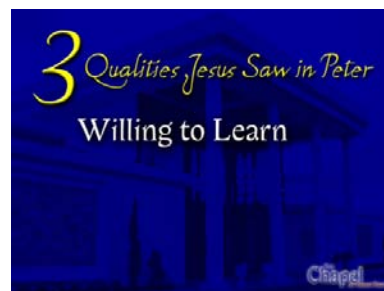
And I think Jesus would have looked at me and said, *“You’ve pointed out his personality flaws, fine. Now let me show you some of the things in Peter’s personality that I can build on – and when I’m done, he is going to be a rock!”*

Again, let me give you 3 **What Jesus saw in Peter**

1st – Peter has a willingness to learn.

What better quality can a teacher find in his student than a willingness to learn?

And for Peter this seems to be a lifelong trait.



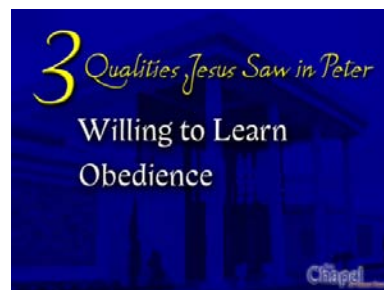
In fact, if you go through the Gospels and look at every question that was ever asked of Jesus, and then notice who asked the question – you will discover that Peter asked Jesus more questions than all the other disciples combined.

And I've taught long enough to know that good students ask more questions. Peter had a willingness to learn.

2nd – Peter had a willingness to obey.

You know, I believe that the two most important keys for spiritual formation in our lives can be found in these 2 themes:
1) – a willingness to learn, and 2) a willingness to obey.

Spiritual growth will always take place when there is a willingness to learn what God wants and expects and a willingness to obey once we know what he wants.



Peter's willingness to obey is perhaps seen best in a story from Luke chapter 5.

Peter is part of a crew of experienced, seasoned fishermen. They've been fishing all night – but no results – every time they pull up their nets, empty. It's a little embarrassing because Jesus has invited himself along for the ride.

They've tried everything and have pretty much given up – when Jesus speaks up and says, **“Why don't you try throwing your nets off this side of the boat?”** Peter starts to protest. *“But, Jesus,”* he says *“We (meaning we experienced fishermen) have been at it all night. Trust me – we've missed the run.”* (And you know that under his breath Peter is saying, “And what does a carpenter from a land-locked town like Nazareth know about commercial fishing, anyhow?”)

But then Peter says something very profound. He lets go of his defensiveness and his pride - and even though he's thinking 'this doesn't make sense' - he says, **“But because you say so, I will do it.”** (v.5)

And, of course, the haul is so huge they have to call for help.

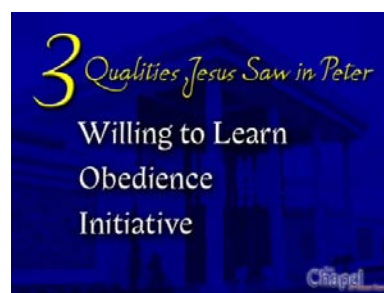
See, Peter had a remarkable willingness to obey Jesus, and it produced in him a solid, rock-like character.

3rd positive thing about Peter – his initiative.

Peter wasn't happy to simply be a spectator or by-stander – he was a man of action.

He understood that following Jesus wasn't just about believing in God – it was about obeying God and serving God – he wanted to be involved in what God was doing.

He's willing to take some risks – to take some initiative.



1. So, when Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do you say I am?” Peter is the first one out of the blocks “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

2. The disciples are in a storm at sea, fearing for their lives. Jesus comes to them, walking on the water. WHO IS IT THAT GETS OUT OF THE BOAT? – It's Peter!

- Don't fault him for sinking – give him credit for being the only man, besides Jesus to walk on water!

3. And on the day of Pentecost – the day the Church is born – WHO STANDS UP AND DELIVERS THE FIRST SERMON? – It's Peter! And it's so effective that 3,000 people are added to the church in one day. And because of that – people are still being added to this day!

So, all of these things are in Peter – the negative and the positive. And Jesus says, "I know all that – but I'm going to build on what's there and I'm going to call him the 'Rock'."

Jesus gave Peter the gift of a new identity.

And he does the same for us. He sees in us what we may never see in ourselves.

I don't know about you, but I have this tendency to define my life in light of my past. I tend to focus on all my mistakes, my faults, my failures, and disappointments. And from all those things I conclude – "God would never want me – he could never use someone like me. I'm nothing to God."

But God doesn't draw the same conclusion that I do. And it's not because he is blind to all of that – it's just that he sees beyond it. He sees the potential I can't even see in myself – someone he can transform into the likeness of his Son.

Oh, it will take some time, to be sure. It's not an overnight process. But here's what's interesting – He doesn't wait for the process to be finished or perfected before he identifies me as his friend. He doesn't say, "Measure up first and then we'll see if you qualify for the invitation to come and be my disciple."

No, his first word is "Come" – come, follow me, and I will make you...I will help you become who you already are.



John Borglum was one of the world's great artists. He was a sculptor. He created the 4 presidents from the rock of Mt. Rushmore. He also did the bust of Abraham Lincoln that now sits in the rotunda of our nation's capital.

The story goes that as he was working on the bust of Lincoln – some friends stopped by to see him – and with them, their 10yr old daughter. As the adults were talking, she wandered around the studio until she came to the still unfinished head of Lincoln. And, though the piece was unfinished – it was clear whose face was emerging.

"Mr. Borglum," she said "May I ask you a question?"

“Of, course, what is it?”

“Is that Abraham Lincoln?”

“Why, yes, it is. Why do you ask?”

“Well, I’d like to know how you knew he was in that rock?”

I think of that when I think of Peter. Who could have guessed that a Rock was in an impetuous, flawed, motor-mouth like Peter?

But Jesus saw it.

And I can’t help but wonder...what does he see in you?

* The main idea of this talk came from a sermon I heard some 15 years ago by George Wood. I am indebted to him for introducing Peter to me as Rocky.