

## "PETER"

### INTRODUCTION

If I were to ask you to name all twelve disciples of Jesus, the chances are that you would begin your listing with the name of Simon Peter. Maybe it's because all of the Gospel lists of the twelve disciples began thus with the name of the big fisherman. Then again it may be because so many of us instinctively identify ourselves with this stumbling, bumbling disciple.

I've never forgotten a rugged and wrinkled farmer in the church I served one winter in Vermont while I was in college. He never said much about his faith, but one day he said this much - "That fellow Simon Peter....he's for me...because I'm so much like him". To be sure many people have seen in "Simon whom Christ surnamed Peter" the symbol of their best aspirations and their poorest performance.

### BACKGROUND AND BROTHER

Actually we know more about this disciple than we do about the others, and it's not at all difficult to paint a picture of his life before he encountered Christ. There were at least two sons in this family that hailed from Bethsaida, a suburb of Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee. It was a fishing family and Simon and Andrew surely spent their boyhoods in the boats and on the docks.

The brothers (as we saw last Sunday) were as different as day and night, like the contrasts in many a family that make us say, "how can they ever belong to the same family". Simon was a thunderstorm, roaring and rumbling at the slightest provocation. Andrew, on the other hands, was a rubber mat that people could walk over. Simon was the kind who would manipulate himself into the front row of the picture; Andrew, on the other hand, would just as soon stand behind someone else.

And so they grew up with these differences in their personalities. Simon - big, blustering, profane, long on popularity, but short on respect. Andrew - quiet, plodding, thinking, searching. We spoke last Sunday of Andrew's introduction of Simon Peter to Jesus. I've often wondered how it happened that Simon accepted Andrew's invitation to meet Jesus. Did he go along simply to placate the whims of his brother, or out of a sense of curiosity, or was there something lacking in his own life, some wistful longing for a sense of direction for a life that was fast leading nowhere? However it may have been, there was something about a look, something about a love, something about a word that pierced the gruff and tough exterior. "You are Simon....from now on your name is....Peter...'a rock'...." It was A. who introd

### DISCIPLESHIP

Even so, if we correctly piece together the Gospel accounts, this was not the beginning of Peter's real discipleship. It was rather the founding of a friendship, and after some time with Jesus that day, he probably went back to his boats and nets until one morning later on, Jesus appeared on the shores of Galilee to greet a group of fishermen coming in, empty handed and exhausted. Remember the incident. The Master's voice gave them a new lift. His insights directed their efforts in another way. And at dawn they were amazingly successful. Then it was that Jesus extended the invitation to discipleship. "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men". Simon was completely overwhelmed by that. He, with his record of fumbles and failures, how could he become a disciple, an ambassador of this paragon of perfection? With a reaction which most of us will readily understand, he blurted out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord." But Jesus would not let go and persisted until he "left everything and followed him".

But still the road of discipleship was a rocky one. Simon did not become Peter as readily as Saul became Paul. The old traits did not tame easily. He had

Life magnificently confirmed the prediction: "You are Simon....from now on your name