Hi,

Today’s updates:

* My 3pm Monday Matthew class and my noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet this week on [my new Facebook Page: “Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC.”](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour)
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

As this Time of Virus drags on and on, I imagine I’m not the only one wondering how we will come back from all the wreckage. Sometimes I have to remind myself that God’s purposes move inexorably forward, even through the worst times. So, we are going to look at some stories of big biblical comebacks. None are really more astounding than the story of Peter’s comeback.

***Luke 22:54-62 (NRSV)***

**Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, “This man also was with him.” But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not!” Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, “Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.” But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about!” At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.**

***Acts 2:22-24, 29-30, 32-33, 36-42 (NRSV)***

**[About six weeks after denying Jesus three times, Peter and the disciples are empowered by the Holy Spirit who arrives on the Day of Pentecost. Peter rises to address the crowd.]**

**“You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.**

**“Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne.**

**This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. . . . .**

**Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”**

**Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**

What must Peter have thought when he looked back on that terrible night when Jesus had been arrested and hauled before Caiaphas, the high priest. During their last meal together, Jesus had foreseen Peter’s weakness, his cut and run attitude when things would get their toughest. Peter, in his unthinking enthusiasm, had told Jesus that he was ready to go with him to prison and even death . . . but Jesus knew better. He told Peter that he would deny Jesus three times before the rooster crowed at sunrise.

In the garden, Peter had slept while his Lord prayed in anguish over the ordeal that lay ahead. When the priests and soldiers arrived, Peter had grabbed a sword and cut off the ear of one of the soldiers. Jesus had, of course, healed the man for his way was not the path of violence. As Jesus was led away, Peter had kept his distance, an observer only.

And then, to his great everlasting shame, Peter had denied Jesus three times in quick succession. Each time, someone had said that they recognized Peter as one of those who had been following Jesus. Each time, Peter quickly and vehemently denied it. And he had wept bitterly over his weakness and his shame. Great rivers of tears had flowed in those early morning hours. But they hadn’t helped. He had just walked away and stayed away until the women had come to find him on Sunday morning with their astonishing story of angels and an empty tomb.

Now, despite Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, Peter’s guilt and shame remained with him. In Jerusalem, he sat with the other believers waiting for . . . well, he wasn’t sure, but Jesus had promised that there was yet more to come.

Suddenly, God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, was present with them, empowering and strengthening them all. Peter felt himself moved and when some of the gathered crowd began to accuse the believers of drunkenness, he rose to speak. The world would never be the same.

*Where did that come from?*

Surely, many in the crowd drawn by the commotion that Pentecost morning knew all about Jesus, his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. And they had undoubtedly heard the claims and rumors about Jesus’ having been resurrected. How could they not have heard? Two decades later, Paul would claim that 500 people had seen Jesus post-resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15). And, at least some in the crowd would have known that Peter was a fisherman from Galilee, one of those rustic rural types, perhaps illiterate and uneducated. And it is even possible that some had heard stories of Peter’s denial of Jesus. It is doubtful that the three people who confronted Peter would have kept those stories to themselves. It wasn’t every day that a self-professed Messiah was put on trial by Caiaphas and Pilate.

So, it isn’t hard to imagine the shock and awe on the faces in the crowd, as Peter rose to speak. This fisherman was telling them that the believers were certainly not drunk. Rather, the long-awaited Day of the Lord had arrived, as promised by God through Joel and the prophets. And not only did Peter make the seemingly silly claim that the Day of the Lord had arrived, he proceeded to claim that his fellow Jews had killed God’s Messiah: “this man . . . you crucified and killed . . . Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

I wonder which part of Peter’s sermon drew the strongest reaction from the crowd. His claim that Jesus, who had been humiliatingly crucified, was Messiah and had been resurrected by God, or his charge that Jesus’ blood was on the crowd’s hands. The onlookers had to be standing there in slack-jawed amazement. They had never witnessed anything like it in all their lives. Surely they asked themselves, “Where did *that* come from?” They would soon learn.

Wide-eyed wonderment was not the end of the story. Peter spoke the truth to that crowd and the truth cut right into their hearts. God, again in the person of the Holy Spirit, spoke to them through Peter and the crowd knew the truth of Peter’s words. God had moved with great power that morning among the believers. Now, God was moving with the same power among the crowd. They *knew* their mistake; they *knew* their guilt. And they wanted to know what to do next.

Peter’s answer to them ought to surprise you a bit. He doesn’t tell them, “Love Jesus,” nor does he say, “Let Jesus into your heart.” Rather, he tells them to repent and be baptized; i.e., turn your life around, embrace Jesus’ way, and enter the fellowship of believers. This was the path to the forgiveness that the crowd sought. And thousands did just that.

How does one account for a comeback such as Peter’s? In six weeks, he goes from a frightened denier of Jesus to a courageous man willing to risk death by telling the crowds the truth. We know that the explanation lies with God. That the power of God’s Spirit strengthened and emboldened Peter and also moved thousands of onlookers to genuine repentance. The same God, by the same Spirit, moves among us, dwelling within each of us, empowering us to do God’s work – to invite, to worship, to learn, to pray, to care, to give, to serve.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott