

PETER

Some years ago a friend wrote an essay from the viewpoint of Mary Magdalene, imagining what her thoughts might have been during the three days Jesus was in the tomb. She shared this piece again over the Easter weekend, adding that she now wondered how Peter might have been processing these events.

As I consider Peter's life in general, I see a very mixed bag, so to speak. He always seemed to be the most engaged in learning from Jesus. But he also got it wrong on several occasions. But there are two events in his life that seem to act as bookends, that might have been the focus of his thinking during those dark three days.

One of Peter's first interactions with Jesus was when Jesus asked to use his boat to teach the crowds at Capernaum. After He was done teaching, he told Peter to let down the nets for a catch. Peter answered that they had been fishing all night and caught nothing, but would let down the nets just to humor Him. The catch was so large the boat nearly sank. When Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' feet and said, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (See Luke 5:1-11.) Jesus knew Peter's attitude when told to let down the nets and blessed his efforts anyway. It was at this point that Peter left everything to follow Jesus.

The other bookend event was Peter's three-fold denial of Jesus the night He was betrayed. He had vehemently declared that he would never deny Jesus and, in fact, was ready to die with Him. Just hours later, after a rooster crowed, when Jesus' and Peter's eyes were locked on each other, Peter was convicted once again of his sinfulness. And he wept bitterly. (See Luke 22:54-62.)

I can't help but think that Peter's thoughts were dominated by the knowledge that he was utterly sinful, that no matter how closely He had followed Jesus, he was still the same. Amid the swirl of thoughts – "I know He was the Messiah. I saw the miracles. I saw His glory. I believed with all my heart. What happened? Why didn't He institute the kingdom like He said?" – was the constant recognition that something was terribly wrong inside himself, something he was helpless to rectify.

We see in Peter's first two sermons (Acts 2:14-40, 3:11-26) that he clearly understands the sinful human condition and the need for repentance. We see in his assurances of restoration (Acts 2:38-39, 3:19) that he himself has been restored.

A friend once said to me that she struggled with sin more now than when she was a new believer (and certainly more than before she knew Christ). She questioned whether she was a worse sinner now than before. My response was to say that any time we are convicted of sin, we can know that Jesus is active in our lives. The more we are convicted, the more we can assume He is involved, so greater conviction of sin is an evidence of growth in the Christian life. Peter's life is an example for us.