

Communion Response

Caversham Baptist Church
2 June 2019

As we come to communion today, I want to focus on the fact God holds us accountable for our thoughts, words, actions and reactions. We often pray that the Holy Spirit will move in our gatherings, so we experience the overwhelming presence of God, but I want to invite the Holy Spirit to do something quite different this morning and speak to us about things in our lives that need changing.

Are you prepared to do that?

Holy Spirit, we welcome you in this place. As people who have chosen to follow Jesus, we desire to be more like him and more like the people you created us to be. Please open our minds and soften our hearts this morning so we can hear you speak to us.

Early church leaders agreed that the Gospel of Mark reproduces the preaching of Peter. Peter's personality can be found on almost every page, and the main characteristic of this Gospel is action.

Peter was a man of action! When one of the disciples stepped out of the boat to walk on water it was Peter. When Jesus took three of his disciples up a mountain to see him transfigured before their eyes one of them was Peter. When one of the disciples made a bold statement about who Jesus was, it was, you guessed it, Peter. When Jesus was arrested one of his disciples took matters into their own hands to defend him. No surprises that it was Peter.

If we were to sit down and write our memoirs, it's highly likely we'd blame other people for our failings. I'm told that's the case in Hillary Clinton's book, *What Happened*, her take on the 2016 American Presidential election. The great thing about the Gospel of Mark is that it reveals Peter's

attempts to follow Jesus warts and all. There's no attempt to ignore Peter's failings and paint him in a better light and so it's a useful resource for us because, let's face it, we mess up on a pretty regular basis!

I want to look at four examples from the life of Peter this morning and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us about each one.

The first is from Mark 9:2-6: Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Peter 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." (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

Peter didn't know what to say but he chose to blurt something out anyway. Why do we feel we have to do this? Silence is a natural and healthy part of good conversation. It might feel a bit awkward on the phone, but in a one-on-one conversation silence shouldn't be feared. In fact, if the person we're talking to is sharing something from the heart we need to learn to be quiet, to be silent and to listen.

Brian Lowe is the manager of Youthline Otago. He wrote an opinion piece in the *Otago Daily Times* recently where he said that in order to prevent suicide we can "Start by being that non-judgemental and trusted friend, family/whanau member or colleague. Be a good listener. Make time for people and give them your attention. Be approachable. Be able to talk about emotions and how people feel."

An important lesson we can take from Peter is this: when we don't know what to say, it's better not to say anything!

We are accountable to God for the things we say.

**Father God,
We know our words are powerful. Words can be used to encourage, to affirm, to praise and to express love. But words can also attack, destroy, betray and humiliate. Please help us to listen, even more than we speak. Please help us to choose our words wisely and to make them life-giving.**

We are accountable to God for the things we say. We're also accountable to God for our actions.

Just after Jesus had predicted Peter's denial, they went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" (Mark 14:32-42)

One of the most difficult things about being a Christian is maintaining a meaningful relationship with God. It's strange, we believe the Bible is

God's Word, but we often describe it as a dry read. We believe Jesus is alive today, but we find all kinds of excuses to avoid talking to him. We believe we need to be filled with the Spirit, but we fill our lives with distractions.

Maintaining a meaningful relationship with God requires us to work out the best time of the day for us to do that. It won't be the same for everyone. Maintaining a meaningful relationship with God requires discipline. Like disciple, it comes from the root word *discipulus*, the Latin word for pupil. If Jesus is to be our teacher, we have to win the spiritual battle that we enter every time we try to make reading the Bible a priority in our lives. Being accountable to someone can make a big difference.

At the moment, Jesus wants us to be about his business but too many of us are asleep on the job!

We are accountable to God for our actions.

**Father God,
It is a privilege and an honour to be one of your disciples. Please forgive us for the times we take it for granted. We need your help to be disciplined. Please give us the desire to read your Word, to know you more and to be accountable for our efforts to please you.**

We are accountable to God for the things we say. We are accountable to God for our actions. We're also accountable to God for our reactions. All four Gospels say that when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane one of his companions drew his sword and cut off the right ear of the high priest's servant (Mark 14:47). John names the aggressor as Peter (John 18:10).

How do you react when you're put under pressure? What comes out of your mouth when you're stressed out at work? How do you respond when someone puts you down? What do you do when someone doesn't play by

the rules on the sportsfield? How do you speak to your kids when they play up?

People squeeze lemons to get lemonade. What comes out of your mouth when the squeeze goes on?

We are accountable to God for our reactions.

Father God,

We are all put under pressure at times and want to honour you when times are tough. Please help us when we need to breathe deeply and count to 10. Above all else, guard our hearts, for it is the wellspring of life and out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

We are accountable to God for the things we say. We are accountable to God for our actions. We are accountable to God for our reactions. We're even accountable to God for our thoughts.

Let's hear from the man himself:

Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

1 Peter 1:13-16

We are accountable to God for our thoughts.

Father God,

No one makes a fool out of you. Whatever we plant we'll end up harvesting. We apologise for the times we dwell on thoughts of pride, jealousy, bitterness and rage. Please transform us by renewing our minds and help us to strive for holiness in all we do.