

Easter People! We sing about it. We tell about it. And we claim that we are "Easter People." So, a question before us this morning is this: "Easter People" means what? What does it mean to be an "Easter People?" The first thing that occurs to me is that Easter People are related to Easter—the Story of Jesus!

Pope John Paul II said, "We are the Easter people, and hallelujah is our song." Easter people are not the people who just go to church to hear the story of Jesus, but they are the people who live out 'hallelujah song.' Living out 'hallelujah song' means to rejoice in praising God not just on Sundays in the faith community, but every day, wherever we are. So, Easter people are joyful people in praising God because of the story of Jesus we have accepted as the story of our faith.

For remaining the joy in praising God every day and wherever we are, last week we took Apostle Paul's advice to do the simple exercise of ABC—admit, believe, and choose:

- **Admit** that we are unrighteous persons who cannot make ourselves right with God by our own efforts (Romans 10:1-4),
- **Believe** Jesus as Christ the Savior (Romans 10:5-11), and
- **Choose** Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9-13).

Theoretically, we, Easter people who practice this simple exercise of ABC, have gotten all things together. However, we know that we are not there yet. Often, we are discouraged by the fact that we are so imperfect. If you are struggling with your imperfection, today's message is for you. For those looking for perfection in Easter People or church, I need to disappoint you right up front by saying that you are not likely to find it. There is no perfect church, no perfect pastor, no perfect council chair, and no perfect lay leader.

Being Easter people does not mean that we have all things together. Being Easter people means we partner with God in His perfection to work on our imperfection in this imperfect world by practicing the simple exercise of ABC until we are perfected at the return of our Savior. This means we become a successful failure as Easter People.

One of Jesus' disciples, Peter, is a great example in the New Testament of successful failure. He made the most blunders of anyone, and yet he survived, and like a cat tossed in the air, he landed on his feet and became a loved hero.

In today's scripture, we see the flight plan of Peter blow up in his face. He thinks he is in control of the situation and has such a grasp of the way life should go that he has the audacity to take Jesus aside to set Him straight. Talk about aggressive leadership. Here is a disciple telling the Master the score. Peter has put his foot in his mouth before but never up to the knee. He has become a megalomaniac, that is one who has grandiose delusions.

He has just confessed that Jesus is the Son of the living God and that He is the Messiah (vs. 16), yet he begins to rebuke the Messiah because he does not like what He is saying (v. 22). Jesus is telling it like it is, and the truth is not pleasant. He will suffer, be rejected, and be killed which are the parts of Jesus' story. That is not an acceptable program to Peter, so he takes Jesus aside to reprogram God's plan.

There is only one other person in history who had that kind of pride, and that was Lucifer. No wonder Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!" (vs. 23). Peter had become a tool of the devil in trying to reprogram God's plan.

Can "Easter People" fall so low they can become an agent of Satan? Yes, they can, and it is not just by falling low, but also, as we see here, by rising too high. Peter was exalted to the very gates of heaven. Jesus gave him the keys of the "kin-dom" of heaven, and he had the power to bind or loose on earth, which would lead to binding or loosing in heaven (vs. 19). Peter's promotion went to his head, and he began to think that he now had the authority to even alter the course of the Messiah and set policy on the plan of salvation.

Peter was a mere fisherman, but Jesus chose him to be a spiritual giant and made him rise to the heights of leadership and power in the "kin-dom" of God. And what does he do? He blows up the mission to pieces by abusing the power that was given to him.

How many other leaders do you know who was called Satan by the Lord? There were no others. Peter was the greatest failure in his abusive power. And yet we see that he not only survives, but he does so quite successfully. He is able to stay on

top as the leader of the 12. He does everything wrong and still comes out as a winner.

So, I would say that he is the most successful failure in the New Testament. Consider this record of his failure:

1. He lost faith while walking on the water and began to sink.
2. He rebuked his own Messiah and received the strongest rebuke of anyone.
3. He refused to have his feet washed and had to be forced to cooperate.
4. He cut off the ear of Malchus in Gethsemane and needed to be rebuked.
5. He went to sleep when Jesus asked him to watch with Him.
6. He denied his Lord 3 times.

Ok. Let's give him the benefit of the doubts. Up until now, he failed because it was before the resurrection day, before Easter. After the resurrection, did he become a perfect disciple of Jesus? Not at all. He failed continuously.

7. He refused to believe the eye-witness testimony of the women who saw Jesus after the resurrection.
8. He fell back into prejudice against the Gentiles even after Pentecost.
9. He was rebuked by the Apostle Paul for his inconsistency.

These are just his major mistakes and blunders. He had a number of minor ones as well. We cannot come up with a list like this even for the scoundrels in the New Testament.

Yet, Jesus made him the leader of the group. Trajan was one of the greatest of the Caesars and the senate raised a towering column to record his victories, but today in Rome, we no longer see the Emperor on top of that column raised to his honor. We see, instead, a statue of a man with two large keys in his hands—the man whose name is Peter, a successful failure.

Easter People are not perfect people, but they are the successful failures who get up repeatedly by fully relying on God when they fall. Easter People made 10 mistakes yesterday, but today they make 9 mistakes. Maybe tomorrow they will make 8 mistakes as they try to live out 'hallelujah song' each and every day. So, what does it mean to be an "Easter People" for you? In other words, to what degree do you demonstrate that you are an "Easter People?" The answer is yours. Amen.