

In today's scripture, we see Jesus' confused disciples, particularly Peter. It was utterly foreign to Peter and the other disciples to think Messiah would willingly allow Himself to be killed by the Jewish religious leaders. In their minds, this simply couldn't happen. Peter's knowledge of who Jesus was did not overcome his assumptions about what Jesus would do. He was confused when he discovered that Jesus would not do things exactly as he'd prefer or thought of Jesus to do (John 6:65-66).

Perhaps, Peter was confused because his mind was on human things, not the things of God. Perhaps he focused on himself and his ability to protect Jesus from harm. As Peter showed in his claim during the Last Supper (John 13:37) and his actions when Jesus was arrested (John 18:10-11), he seemed overly confident in his own power. Indeed, Peter and all the others focused on Jesus' ability to overthrow the Romans and return Israel to power and prominence. On the same level, they were also thinking about what parts each of them would play when the Messiah established His powerful kingdom on earth (Matthew 18:1). They did not yet understand how essential it was for Jesus to suffer, die, and resurrect to complete His mission. They were spiritually confused.

From today's scripture, we see how Jesus dealt with the confusion of His disciples, particularly Peter's. Here are some coping strategies Jesus used to help His spiritually confused disciples.

First, Jesus talked and explained to His disciples (vs. 21). His disciples did not even know they were confused. They were so confident in their knowledge of Jesus without any doubts. They were so occupied with their own understanding and had no room to hear a new idea different from theirs. Peter even took Jesus aside and rebuked Jesus for telling him the idea that contradicted his (vs. 22). Wow! A student rebuking a teacher? His behavior was out of order. It was very inappropriate for any student-teacher relationship in that culture. Disciples simply did not talk to their masters in such a way, directly contradicting them.

To these confused disciples, especially Peter, who was outspoken, Jesus took the shocking next step by saying, "Get behind me, Satan!" (vs. 23). This Jesus' response to Peter maybe even more shocking for Peter because Jesus praised Peter

enthusiastically and declared that Peter now possessed the keys to the kingdom of heaven just before He tried to talk Peter out to clarify his confusion (Matthew 16:17-19).

Jesus went further, saying to Peter—he was a hindrance and obstacle to Jesus. More than just not helping, Jesus spoke straight to Peter—he was actively getting in the way. Jesus was clear. This was happening because Peter was confused. So, Jesus talked and explained the situation first, but it didn't go well. So, He used a shock treatment to get Peter's attention and realign his thoughts of Christ with the correct understanding.

After this shocking treatment, Peter was changed, and indeed he became a person awakening others by saying in 2 Peter 1:8, "For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, he was saying if we are Christians who are complacent with our growth in God, we are in danger.

The Bible makes clear that Christians are never standing still. Church, as *ekklesia*, an organism, is not static. Christians who make church are either growing or backsliding. Anyone who is not growing is backsliding. Any *ekklesia* that is not growing is in confusion.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, we, the church, *ekklesia*, were complacent without noticing how the ministry context was evolving and consistently changing. Many churches didn't think of using social media as their ministry tool before the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some studies done before the COVID-19 pandemic strongly suggested pastors not use social media even though the number of social media users was growing.

Like Peter and the other disciples, we were confused when the federal and state regulations mandated that we and all other organizations stop conducting in-person gatherings on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020. It was about a little over a week after the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus, so-called "COVID-19," outbreak as a global pandemic on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020. We were totally lost and confused since we'd never thought of being a church without meeting face-to-face.

The abrupt pandemic shutdown was almost like Jesus' sudden rebuke to Peter, which confused him, and yet awakened him. The COVID-19 pandemic confused us all and yet awakened us all from our complacency in living life as Christians.

Somewhat forcefully, we saw things we'd never noticed before. We started to respond to the need we saw by stretching ourselves even to the moment we walked out of our comfort zone.

Joyce Brady, our English Language Ministry Lay Leader, and I made an executive decision boldly to offer an online worship service right away when we were mandated to shut down the in-person gathering. This decision was fully supported by the Leadership Team of the church led by Dr. Tim Brady. I had to learn all the basic tech skills within three days to make the online worship possible on Sunday. Wow! It was a miracle. Everything got started with a \$5-ring light and a laptop in my small home office with Joyce. Les Miller, the prayer ministry team leader, joined us to navigate through the uncharted territory of the COVID-19 pandemic. Later, many clergy leaders in The United Methodist Church connection and the lay members of our church stepped up to carry out the ministry together.

While doing what we had to do, God blessed us to become aware of an underserved population and transformed the 10am online worship to be "Deaf Friendly," which was adopted by two national organizations—The United Methodist Committee for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Ministries and The United Methodist Congress for the Deaf. It was amazing to see how God grew God's "kingdom" during challenging times as God broadened our understanding of God's mission.

One of the highly attended online worship services was the online worship offered on Sunday, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. We had Bishop Eduard Khegay, the Resident Bishop of the Moscow Area in Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference of The United Methodist Church, as our guest preacher. 4,000+ people in Real-Time attended our online worship service on that day.

Over the years, we were fully supported by many Godly caring people, such as:

- (1) Once again, Bishop Eduard Khegay, the Resident Bishop of the Moscow Area in Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference of The United Methodist Church,
- (2) Bishop Mary Ann Swenson, a retired Bishop of the California-Pacific Annual Conference,
- (3) Mr. Thomas Kemper, the General Secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church who just retired last year,

- (4) Bishop Warner Brown Jr, a retired Bishop of the California-Nevada Annual Conference,
- (5) Rev. Dr. Jong Chun Park (otherwise known as J.C. Park), the President of the World Methodist Council,
- (6) Rev. Dr. Eunice Musa Illiya, a clergywoman in the Nigeria Episcopal Area of The United Methodist Church,
- (7) Rev. Andrew Lee, a missionary with the General Board of Global Ministries serving as a Country Coordinator for the Methodist Mission in Cambodia,
- (8) Rev. Dr. Bener Agtarp, the Executive Director of the Community Engagement & Church Planting of Path 1 and the Director of the Connectional Mobilization at the General Board of Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church,
- (9) Bishop Peggy Johnson, the Resident Bishop of the Philadelphia Area of The United Methodist Church, is a retired bishop but now is an Interim Bishop of the New England Conference (Boston Area) beginning January 1<sup>st</sup> this year, 2023,
- (10) Rev. Dr. David Jamir, the Senior Pastor at Sun City United Methodist Church in Chino Hills, California,
- (11) Rev. Oleg Starodubets, the District Superintendent of Central Asia UMC in Ukraine, and
- (12) Rev. Dr. Yulia Starodubets, a clergywoman, a medical doctor, and a professor at a Medical School in Ukraine.

I give my heartfelt thanks to these amazingly caring people of God who supported me and the ministry under my leadership unconditionally when I needed help most. Not only that, many of the lay leaders of our church, Kona United Methodist Church, fully trusted me and partnered with me to navigate this unknown, uncharted territory. Thank you.

Now we are currently in a different stage of pandemic life. Once again, we are adjusting how we conduct the church ministry by retiring our 10am "Deaf Friendly" Online Worship as of today.

Well done, all good and faithful servants of God who have made this "Deaf Friendly" Online Worship possible for 150 weeks. Thank you all for worshipping with us faithfully. Please continue your worship with us by joining our 8:30am Hybrid Worship Service, fully auto-closed captioned.

Jesus dealt with His disciples' confusion with His spoken words—sometimes softly and another time somewhat harshly. In the same way, we can deal with our confusion with the Word of God. Let the Word of God speak to us today and in the days to come. Amen.