

In 2006, just in time for Christmas, a judge in New York City granted Jose Luis Espinal the right to legally change his name to Jesus Christ. When asked about his decision, the former Espinal said simply, “I am that person. My lifetime’s work is fulfilling the scriptures.”

Take a moment to let that sink in. Use this minute to make whatever snide remark you need to the person sitting next to you; tell yourself how dumb our world seems sometimes – laugh about how wasteful it can be or how easy it is for some people to miss the mark. And when you’ve taken that minute, consider yourself. Look in the mirror and think about the last time you were that man. Because every one of us is guilty of the same at some point; every one of us has grasped for the title of Lord at one point or another. We just tend to be a little more subtle about it.

In fact, I think that’s why Jesus’ rebuke of Peter is so shocking. This is Jesus, telling the disciple to whom he has given the keys to the kingdom “get behind me Satan” – and as I read this passage this week, I kept coming back to those four words. They seem so stark, so harsh. Did Peter really deserve that?

What I realized was that I was hearing this passage with 2017 ears, filtered through nearly two thousand years of other ideas and history. We don’t read this passage on its own. It comes to us with the baggage of Dante Alligheri and John Milton’s ideas, because we’ve come to see Satan as a particular character throughout the Biblical Narrative: the ruler of hell - God’s once trusted Lieutenant – cast down after rebellion in Heaven. And while that makes for compelling mythology, you won’t find it anywhere in Scripture. Because while there is a Satan that crops up throughout the story of God, it isn’t a name any more than Christ is Jesus’ last name. Satan, it turns out, is a title. With the exception of one other passage, every single other time the word shows up in Scripture – both old and new testaments - it’s always proceeded, in the original languages, by *the*. Every. Single. Time. But. One. And this would have surprised exactly no one in the ancient world. Because in a world where Kings and emperors ruled with an omnipotence that we can’t imagine today, to speak against them would be suicide.

But over time, Kings began to get wise to the fact that if their only advisors were yes-men, how could they know if they were making the right decision? So kings throughout the ancient world would employ their own ha-Satan – literally, the adversary, who would advise the king but would be not only empowered, but required to disagree. If the king wanted to march the army west, it was the responsibility of the Satan to make a compelling case to go east instead. The Satan represented a check on the power of the King, not an equal.

It’s that identity that drives Jesus’ response to Peter. It’s like Jesus wants to ask Peter, have you forgotten that I already gave you a new identity? Do you remember that not long ago you were Simon? Don’t you think that if I wasn’t absolutely sure of what I was doing I would have called you something else instead? Don’t you think that I called you Peter, the rock, for a reason? I

wanted you to be steady and strong. When every one else wilts, I wanted you to stand. And yet here you are, not Peter, but Satan.

And with that context in mind, Jesus rebuke of Peter should resonate a little differently for us. Jesus isn't angry here. He's disappointed.

I remember sitting in the back of my parent's car, fourteen years old. I didn't dare say a word as we pulled in the driveway and walked silently into the house. I had gotten caught shoplifting and was waiting to find out what my punishment was going to be. Maybe if I apologize again, I thought, but as I opened my mouth to speak I heard my mother say the words that sunk my soul. Some of you have said them to your own kids, some of you have heard them. "I can't even look at you right now."

Get behind me Satan.

Jesus is disappointed because Peter thinks he knows better. He thinks that somehow, there is a better way to save the world. Somehow, giving everything doesn't really mean giving everything. There is a piece of life that Peter wants to hold back, something Peter refuses to turn over control of. It's disappointing because Peter has the right knowledge. Moments earlier, he answered the central question of the Gospel: who do you say that I am? It's disappointing because Peter readily confesses Jesus as Messiah, but refuses to let him be.

Peter serves as a reminder for us this morning that confessing Jesus as Messiah isn't enough. We have to act like it's true as well.

As Christians, we believe that God isn't finished with us yet, that we live under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, what the Bible calls sanctification – making us Holy as God is holy. We all have areas in our lives we stubbornly refuse to turn over to God. For some of us it manifests as an addiction, and for others it is a pattern of behaviour we never seem able to overcome. But for the majority of Christians it's the same: we hold back from fully committing our time, talent and treasure to the work of God because we don't believe it will really make a difference. If every person here today got involved in one new ministry or mission project as part of the life of St. Andrew's we would have to turn people away. If every household that calls this church home gave three percent of their income to the church we would have more than enough to meet our budget. If every person here acted like they believed that their gifts and talents, no matter how obscure or insignificant they might seem had a place in church, we could change the world. But we don't.

We hold back our time and our talent for one of two reasons: because someone else will do it or we don't really think that the work of the church matters as much as something else. Beyond Sunday morning, God has given you more than 160 hours every single week. That's a lot of hours, so even if you work a full time job and get a solid nine hours of sleep every single day,

that still leaves you more than thirty hours that are purely yours. How many of those do you give back to God outside of Sunday? Instead we find ourselves talking about volunteer burnout.

The same is true of our treasure. I'll be the first to stand up here and tell you that the idea of the tithe is an Old Covenant idea, with no standing under the covenant of Grace. But I'll also be the first to say that the expectation under the covenant of Grace is excessive generosity and that maybe giving a tenth of what God has given us first is a good place to start. Instead the average church going Canadian gives 1-2% of his or her income. The wealthiest generation that the world has ever produced is about to retire with the biggest accumulation of wealth that the world has ever seen and the church is asked to carry out the mission of God with nickels and dimes. We've been blessed by some enduring gifts that have let us do all the work you see around you in the sanctuary this summer without touching the budget – but the question that all of us should be asking “is God disappointed with my giving?” Is God disappointed with the way I've modeled giving for the next generation?

This isn't about me, or about the church, or about anything else. This is about you and your relationship with God, because this is about discipleship. When we hold back, we are refusing to let God be God of every part of our lives - refusing to become the disciples God wants us to be. And that doesn't make God angry or vengeful. I'm not up here today to scare you. I'm up here today because I want all of us to understand the disappointment God feels when we try and name ourselves Lord. Because we are woefully unqualified for the job.

God doesn't need to be our Messiah as though he gets some satisfaction from saving us – even from ourselves. God's nature is complete before we ever get involved. But what his nature is, is loving and gracious. He wants to be our Messiah because giving every part of our lives over to him benefits us. He wants to save us for our own good. When we trust him with our time and our talents and our treasure we reap the rewards.

That's why Jesus ends here with a call to discipleship. We simply cannot call ourselves disciples of Christ if we are not willing to call him Lord of every area of our life.

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.