The Peter Plan

Part 2 of 5 – Restore That Person Gently

Dear friends in Christ,

Last week we informed you that our congregation will be implementing a new ministry program called *The Peter Plan*. The key component of the plan is very simple—worship registers. During the offering a register will be handed down each row, allowing each family (or individual) to record that they were present. This is really no different than what many WELS congregations do, having people register for communion.

The primary goal of this plan is to follow St. Peter’s divinely inspired instructions. **“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care”** (1 Peter 5:2). If a member has to miss worship regularly because of work or illness, it is our responsibility to continue to feed him with God’s Word in whatever way we can, just as a shepherd feeds his sheep.

The secondary goal of *The Peter Plan* is illustrated by a well-known event in Peter’s life.

On Maundy Thursday evening Peter told Jesus that if all the other disciples left him, he would remain faithful. Just hours later Peter denied Jesus three times. Peter had strayed from his Savior. After Jesus rose, Peter wondered about his place among Jesus’ followers. Would Jesus even want him back?

So one day near the Sea of Galilee, Jesus pulls Peter aside. (See John, chapter 21.) Jesus does not berate or scold Peter. Jesus is gentle. He asks Peter three times, **“Simon, do you love me?”**Three times, reminding Peter of the three-fold denial. Each time, Peter responded, **“Lord, you know that I love you.”** Peter knew that Jesus could read his heart. Jesus could see that Peter loved him, even if Peter’s recent denials did not demonstrate love. Jesus then made it crystal clear to Peter that not only was Peter forgiven, but Jesus also still wanted Peter to serve as a disciple. For every time Peter spoke, Jesus responded, **“Feed my lambs… my sheep.”** We would have understood if Jesus had been angry or harsh, but instead Jesus restored Peter gently. A crushing weight was lifted off Peter that day.

St. Paul says that what Jesus did for Peter, we want to do for one another. **“If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently”** (Galatians 6:1).

That is a secondary goal of *The Peter Plan*. While many people miss worship repetitive weeks for legitimate reasons, there are others who begin to miss worship repetitively for illegitimate reasons. Like Peter, they drift away from their Savior. It might be that they are taking a “break” from church. It might be that they got into a quarrel with someone at church and don’t want to see them. It might be that they decided they disagree with some doctrine our church teaches.

Scripture tells us that when something like that happens, we want to deal with it early on. (Jesus ascended forty days after he rose. So he obviously dealt with Peter in a timely fashion.) The Bible says that sin “hardens” the heart (Hebrews 3:13). If you quickly talk to someone who is wrestling with a sin, they may be more apt to listen than if you talk to them six months later. Over that longer period of time, the person’s sin may have hardened them. Think of it this way. It is easier to crush an acorn than it is to cut down an oak!

Therefore, the secondary goal of *The Peter Plan* is to identify when people are slipping into the sin of neglecting the means of grace. If someone starts to fall into the habit of skipping worship, we want to gently encourage them to return to the unique blessings that God offers in the assembly of the saints. That is probably going to be easier to do if we talk to them early on, instead of waiting till they have been absent for many months.

**“Restore that person gently.”** Just like Jesus did for Peter. That is another goal of *The Peter Plan*. Next time, we will see why this is so important.