

When snippets and soundbites of his life are read chronologically, one on top of the other as Diane just read them, we're offered an interesting perspective on Peter the Apostle's life that we might miss if we just look at one of the stories in the sequence. Read together in a group like this, we glimpse Peter's passion, his zeal, and his utter fallibility.

"Yes, Lord. I have faith to walk on water." But as soon as things get a bit breezy, "No, no, no! I was wrong. Never mind. OH MY GOD, (literally) I'M GONNA DIE!!!!"

And then there's that time when Peter thinks he knows more about the Son of God than the Son of God does, "Look here, Jesus. You keep talking about dying some terrible death but I am here to tell you, that's not gonna happen to you." To which Jesus replied, "Get behind me, Satan."

And then, perhaps the most notable, "Oh, no, Master. Others might betray you, but me? Oh, no never. Never ever. I will be with you every step of the way, even if it means I die right there beside you." But just hours later, "Oh, come on! You must be crazy. I'm no Galilean. And who is Jesus? I don't know anybody named Jesus! I do not know that man. Leave me be."

Peter. Oh, Peter. It could be so easy for us to judge him from our safe vantage point nearly 2000 years and 5,693 miles away. We could say he was lacking in faith or fool-hearty or rash. And, those judgments would be true. And yet, for me at least, those judgments would be true of myself as well. And perhaps that's why I have such an affinity for Peter. He's passionate and earnestly sends mixed messages. He flagrantly contradicts himself and others. Just when you think Peter has finally bought into what Jesus is saying, he sells out for an easier or more comfortable message. Peter bounces all over place. And yet, with all of his faults, Jesus loved him still saying to him, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Mt. 16:18)

Peter follows through on his charge as we heard Diane read about from the Book of Acts at the end of the series of readings. After the Resurrection, Peter becomes an extraordinary and compelling preacher, a devoted disciple, living for Jesus a life that was true up until, as traditional holds, he was crucified, upside down, by Roman authorities in 64 CE. Even though he was mixed up and rash and sometimes foolish, God gave Peter the gifts he needed for ministry, reminding us yet again that God does not call the qualified, God qualifies the called.

And that's why, when I was watching the Christopher Robin movie—currently available on Netflix—when I was watching that movie and witnessed Tigger bouncing all about from one thing to the next, bossing people around and yet showing his fellow residents of The Hundred Acre Wood such devotion and love, I was reminded of Peter from the gospels. Indeed, that connection was the genesis of this *Winnie the Pooh, and the Gospel, Too* sermon series.

Tigger and Peter have some things in common. They exhibit fervor and passion. They are, Tigger literally and both of them metaphorically, they are Leapers. They throw caution to the wind and give every endeavor their all, leaping in, heart, mind, and soul. They move into new adventures without reservation and are eager to try new things, Leapers through and through.

Indeed, in most churches, there will be people who are a little like Peter and Tigger, there will be a few Leapers—people who move forward with gusto, folks whose enthusiasm is contagious, congregants who would rather try something new and fail rather than just keep on doing things the same old tired way they've

always been done. Leapers are what some people call “idea people” and when they get an idea in their head, Leapers go for it.

I fancy myself somewhat of a Leaper. Wanna be 22 years old and move 800 miles away from home for seminary to someplace where you do not know a single soul and you only have a suitcase, laptop, Bible, and \$268 bucks to your name? Okay, why not! Wanna literally be a Leaper and jump out of an airplane to go skydiving and witness the glory of the Rhode Island sea coast from 10,000 feet above? You betcha! Wanna try to talk Jon Walter and Perri into transforming the sanctuary into The Hundred Acre Wood because you have some cocky-mamie plan for a sermon series in your head? Let’s do it! My initial instinct when it comes to responding to nearly any opportunity or proposition—so long as it doesn’t have anything to do with snakes—is Yes! Let’s try it! I am a Leaper.

It’s likely my parents would say I’ve been a Leaper from the get go. They tell a story about me being at the town pool when I was toddler and I literally leaped right into the deep end of the pool. Just jumped right in—even though I had never learned to swim. Thankfully my mom is an adept swimmer and she dove in and got me, and then dove in and got me again, and then dove in and got me one more time. Then we left the pool because I didn’t seem to pick-up on the consequences of my actions. Though I’m an eager Leaper, I apparently am not a quick Learner.

And so it is that there are pros and cons to the zeal of the Leaper. Peter’s life reveals that enthusiasm, fervor, and leaping right into a challenge can lead to great things. Often it is the Leapers who lead a congregation into places they likely wouldn’t have gone on their own. And yet, Peter could have saved himself and the other disciples a lot of time and heartache had he just contained his Leaper tendencies every now and again to pause for a while to be a Learner.

It’s likely we all know some Learners—people who just love to learn. They are founts of knowledge on many topics. They delve into books and programs. They attend classes and seminars. They tend to be good listeners. In terms of our life together as a church family, they are often the ones who engage in disciplined Bible study, we may even refer to them as the “chapter and verse people.” When we say something like, “Isn’t there something in the Bible that says something like . . .”, chapter and verse people are good at telling us where in the Bible it can be found. Learners love to learn for the sake of learning.

And, we are all, in some way or another, Learners. As members of a faith family, we are invited and expected to continue to learn and grow in our faith throughout our lives. As followers of the Way of Jesus Christ, it’s our responsibility to learn what that Way of Christ is by studying scripture, attending worship, praying and learning about our faith tradition. It’s hard to act in faith or follow in the Way of Christ if we don’t read the map that shows us how to get there or listen to the voice that says, “Come, follow me.”

And while we are all Learners to some extent, just as there are challenges to being a Leaper, there are challenges to being a Learner. Because, unless we’re willing to put our learning into action and leap into opportunities to actively minister to one another and our community, our learning is for naught. The ability to learn is a gift from God and all gifts from God are given for the building up of the Church—for the building up of our faith community. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, and Eugene Peterson put into contemporary English . . . *Christ handed out gifts above and below, filled heaven with the gifts, filled earth with the gifts. Christ handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christ’s followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ’s body, the church, until we’re all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God’s Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.*

In order for this church to minister effectively with all of its parts moving rhythmically and easily with each other, there are times when the Leapers need to pause and learn and the Learners need to leap and use what they know to glorify God through serving others and sharing God's love.

Leapers need Learners to keep their ministry focused and manageable. Learners need Leapers to inspire them to go ahead and get actively involved in ministering to each other. Learners and Leapers but what about the other group mentioned in the sermon title . . . the Letters?

The Letters are the members and friends of our faith family who let us take care of them and minister to them in times of need. It can be hard to admit we are hurting. It can be hard to acknowledge our brokenness. It can be hard to let go of our pride and release our need for control and just let others help us. And yet, in a funny kind of way, we minister to others when we allow them to minister to us. It feels so good to help someone, life would be lousy

Churches doing relevant ministry are made-up of these three kinds of people—Leapers, Learners, and Letters, the kind of people who let others help them in times of need. Indeed, each one of us leaps, learns, and lets at different times in our lives. Peter's life is an invitation for us to consider when and if we're leaping, how and why we're learning, and if we're letting others do their ministry by accepting their help and care. All three of these—leaping, learning, and letting—are important parts of what allows a church to “move rhythmically and gracefully with one another” instead of Leapers being all over the place or Learners holing away in isolation or Letters not feeling invited to be a part of