

“Not the Man I Used to Be” **1 Peter 4**

Allyson has jokingly told people who haven't seen me in awhile, that "I'm half the man I used to be." Everyone laughs. For some people such a phrase could be seen as a great insult because it could refer to some kind of "moral" failure in a person's life that leaves them embarrassed and humbled but in my case it has more to do with my recent weight lost. But it's not the first time - I mean losing weight. My "moral failure" has been my "yo yoing" weight for most of my life that has had me losing 50 pounds or more at least 4 times now. But I digress. Today's sermon is not brought to you by "Weight Watchers™" but the Apostle Peter who reminded me again and maybe a few others here this morning or listening online that "I am not the man I used to be" and I hope and pray that "you are not the man or woman you used to be," either.

The people to whom Peter addressed in his pastoral letter, were spiritual exiles and religious foreigners have now spread throughout the region living as Christians in a non Christian world and foreigners with a different moral compass and worldview than the rest of the world. They now stood before those who knew them but now failed to recognize them. Not that facial features were different or that weight had been dropped but because there was a "change of *intention*," according to Peter. Chances are many of us have returned begrudgingly to that 10th, 20th, 30th (or more) highschool reunion to see old friends and re-acquaint ourselves with those who haven't changed a bit since grade 12 math class and others who you would have never recognized if you bumped into them at the grocery store. But that kind of things is to be expected – the not "recognizing" because everyone's hair thins or greys, most people put on a pound or two and the majority of people's faces gain a few more wrinkles over time. Those kinds of changes are to be expected. But, what about other kinds of changes that aren't so visible? What about the kid from high school that was always getting into trouble but is now a police officer, a lawyer or a judge? What about the kid who never played a minute of competitive sports while in high school but is now a professional athlete or the girl who fainted when she dissected the frog in biology but is now a talented surgeon? And let's not forget to look even deeper than all those "superficial" things. I hope I haven't changed too much since highschool. I mean, I think people could still see the 18-year-old Kirk below the thinning grey hair and wrinkles or at least I hope so. But unless they spoke with me more than a few minutes they would not know the real transformation happened in my life soon after graduation. You see, I hadn't planned on ever working in the church like I am now. As a preacher's kid it's typically not an aspiration you have. In fact many preacher's kids I know, or have heard about, often go in the opposite direction than their God-fearing parent. That's not necessarily my story and some might even say if they met me at the highschool

reunion that they aren't surprised that I ended up "following in my father's footsteps." And they might be right, if what I did was a job and not a "calling." But others, who knew me better, I think, might believe otherwise.

When we are 18 most of us have no idea what we are going to do with the "rest of our lives" as our lesson says. But when you turn 18 and all your friends make you believe they have their entire lives planned out and are heading off to college or university to chase that dream while you live at home and work for minimum wage you begin to think that there has to be something more and you open yourself up to that reality. At least that's my story. So I guess you could say, "The time was right" when at the age of 18 I attended a Men's Conference in Truro, Nova Scotia with two of my brothers. I wasn't planning on anything "big" happening other than meeting a former pro hockey player. To honest that's why I attended in the first place. It wasn't for the food, the company, or especially all the "religious" talk but to get a picture and an autograph. But God had another plan. Paul Henderson (of 1972 Canada Cup fame) was the guest speaker that weekend and he challenged me in words I had heard before - hundreds of time before from the pulpit and the kitchen table but this time it was as if I was hearing them for the first time. So at that conference a life change began - even greater than weight loss. For 18 or so years, life was about "me" and not just because I am the youngest in my family and babies of the family often get whatever they want - which is often true but because I was out only for "me". As someone who grew up "in the church" I was far more familiar with the "Christianese" language than most, so phrases that Peter uses in our passage, like "will of God" were well known - not understood necessarily, but well known to me. Life for me, for the first 18 years was about "my" pleasure, "my" desires, "my" wants - which I assumed gave God pleasure. But boy was I wrong. God didn't exist for my pleasure. Instead I existed for God's pleasure.

When I understood this than a change happened within me - from the inside out. Now I existed for more than just me and even more than just others. Now I existed for God's pleasure alone. I was recently invited to watch a video to help me better understand the continuing discussion happening in our denomination but also in our classrooms and around our kitchen table. Maybe its not part of your vocabulary but it needs to because it something where the world and the church can differ. The video in a nutshell is the basic struggle between human desires versus God's will which just happens to be the same struggle Peter speaks about in 1 Peter 4. Now please understand I am not speaking about the genetic aspects of a person that cannot be changed - like being black, having red hair or the attraction of one sex over another but the choices, the everyday choices we make to live out our lives. So at one point in the video there is a skit of one person posing a question, "Why would God make me this way if I was not supposed to live this way?" It's a valid question. It's even a

reasonable question. And in the minds of many a question that is not even worthy of being posed because the answer is always the same which is, “God would never do such a thing”. In other words human desires and God’s will are never in direct opposition. Such thinking immediately returned me to the Garden, not our rhubarb garden but the Garden, the original Garden and the story of the first battle between human desire and God’s will. Maybe you remember the story? God, if you recall, planted the garden, every tree in the garden. Everything (well nearly everything) was “in bounds” and available for the original couple to enjoy – all except one specific tree that was not to be eaten from. One tree was “out of bounds” and explicitly “not to be touched”. So again you might ask, “Why would God plant a tree and tell us not to eat from it?” To be honest, I’m not sure I know the answer but I do know from the beginning a struggle was brewing between human desires and God’s will that continues to this very day. It’s a life and death struggle. It’s a daily struggle. It’s my struggle. It’s your struggle.

So on a “typical” day that I now see as “not so typical” I realized I had “spent enough time” doing what (everyone else) or as Peter says, “as the Gentiles were doing.” (Back to the struggle of human desire and God’s will) And it’s not that my life was out of control (as is maybe true of your narrative too) but still there was a battle between what I wanted and what God wanted and that I needed to surrender. Now I can certainly relate to “some” of what Peter is speaking about because words like “licentiousness” (which I had to look up) and “revel”, “carousing” or being “lawless” was not necessarily “familiar” to me, per se, but that’s not to say Peter’s list of human desires that keep us away from God is all inclusive or that my life was somehow “better” than others because I was never “licentious,” for example. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory (or maybe I could say the “will”) of God. If you also have trouble with relating with Peter, maybe it would be good for us to go down a few verses more, for further explanation. If the “attitudes” in the verses above don’t speak to you then look at the actions described in verse 8 and following that “condemn” us because we often fail to do them. “Love one another,” “be hospitable to one another” and “serve one another”. “Love”, although hard to do, is something we can all grasp but not so much when it comes to loving those who are hard to love. Most of us can be “hospitable” but not so much when it “costs” us something. And we all like “serving,” especially when we are the one being served and not asked to serve ourselves. And then Peter makes it more difficult when he tags each of these actions with the words “one another” as in love “on another,” be hospitable to “one another” and serve “one another.” With the addition of that phrase comes the reminder again that life is not about “me” but “another” or maybe I should say, “Another” with a capital “A.” When we realize this reality in our lives (not about us) we are made aware that loving, hospitality or serving is about the other and God’s will over the

human desire. It's about taking the focus off yourself and putting it on Another. Peter continues then by telling us "this is what it means to bring glory to God" rather than glory to oneself.

So at the age of 18 I made a life change, a change that has been happening now for over 30 years. As Peter asked me again in the passage, "How will you spend the rest of your life?" I realize again, even today, that I still have some "living" left to do and that my narrative is not simply marked by that date in 1987 or even by today but one specific date in history that happened over two millennia ago. The date that transformed my story and changes your narrative is marked by a day that you decided how will you spend the rest of your life. Not just about what you will do for employment or who you will marry but about surrendering your desires for God's will for Jesus surrendered everything for you. And that's the second date I want you to remember today - that moment in time over two millennia ago where Jesus first chose you. And that's really where my story began and yours as well. It begins with a God who held nothing back to make you His own - A God who was willing to lay down His life for those yet to be born, yet to love Him. It is what stands Christianity apart from all other major and minor religions combined! And all God asks, all God deserves is that you surrender your desires for God's will and spend the rest of your life "not the man (or woman) you used to be – for God's glory now and forever more. Amen and Amen.