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St. Elisabeth's Glencoe  
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Proper 16 Year A  
Exodus 1:8 - 2:10, Romans 12:1-8, Matthew 16:13-20

Go for it

In the mid-90's, my husband and I lived for a year in France. Jason was doing postdoctoral research and our first child was born there. We had studied French in school, but this was our first experience in testing out our French language skills, and we were fully immersed in a French city that saw very few native English speakers. Needless to say, our French improved greatly over the year as we lived and worked and operated in our second language

Between Jason and me, we had widely differing approaches to conversing in French. It even got to be a joke between us and then it even got to be a joke among our French friends. You see, I never wanted to make a mistake. Every French sentence I said came out absolutely grammatically perfect, with correct noun gender, verb tense, and noun-verb agreement. I would work on it and work on it internally until it came out in perfect form. When I didn't know how to say something, I didn't speak. Therefore, you might guess, I didn't say much. I was terrified of making a mistake and preferred to hang back.

Jason on the other hand, was a verbal whirling dervish. He said anything anytime, sometimes right, sometimes wrong. Sometimes the French wouldn't even understand him, but he tried anything until finally there would be nods and laughs and learning and discussion. He hacked through the year with his whole effort, getting laughs and correctives along the way, but with boundless enthusiasm for connecting with the French by whatever means that took. And he was adored for it. I got compliments for my perfect French, but I'm sure everyone assumed I was the quiet type. Jason was admired for his openness and candor. He engaged more deeply in the relationships he forged. He was transformed in ways that I, staying the careful quiet distance, missed out on. Simon Peter's whole life is like Jason speaking French. Peter has been remembered in scripture and tradition as impetuous and impulsive. He blunders his way through almost everything as he follows Jesus. There's the story about his stepping out onto the water thinking maybe he'd be able to walk on it like Jesus, then sinking, then calling out to be saved.

There's the story of God showing Peter, James and John a glimpse of Jesus in heavenly glory: Peter blurts out, "Oh, Jesus it is good that we are here. Let us make three booths for you!!!" Wrong again, Peter. Transfiguration is about NOT being able to contain the Christ. At the Last Supper, Peter refuses to have Jesus wash his feet. "Oh no, Lord, you will never wash my feet!" Then when Jesus gently offers a corrective, Peter again speaks out, wrongly, "Oh then Lord also my hands and my head." Jesus says, No, Peter only your feet are dirty, your hands and head are clean. Another time, Peter vows to die with Jesus, then denies him three times. This bungler seems to be always putting his foot in his mouth.

And yet, two things. One, he is loved for it. Peter's fallible mishaps are lovable and honest. Two, for all his bumbling attempts, Peter is sometimes, profoundly RIGHT. In today's gospel, Jesus asks the disciples the most direct question of his identity in the entire Bible. "Who do you say that I am?"

God bless Peter's impulses. You are the Messiah, he says. He got the right answer that time and the whole cosmos shifted. Today's story is the turning point in Matthew's gospel. Everything from here on will point to Jesus ultimate death and coming glory.

Stepping out in courage and giving it a shot is the only way to ever get it right. Any coach will tell you, even the ones that make defense a priority, the only way to get points is to shoot the basketball.

Growth will never come without a stretch. Accepting that being wrong some of the time (or even most of the time) is just a part of it. Look at Peter. He never had to worry about being wrong. Jesus was always there to point it out. The rebukes and the correctives will always be there. And the one time you get it right will be worth it all. It's those glimmers of getting it... the moments when you know you have touched God.

More than one newcomer has told me privately that they have hesitated to come and participate in Adult Forums or Bible Study. They were afraid that they would say something dumb, or not know as much as everyone else. Some shrink from teaching Sunday School for the same reason.

Same goes for some people who have told me that they hesitate to help out with some of St. Elisabeth's outreach efforts; they are uncomfortable with homeless, mentally ill people, or intimidated by hospitals and nursing homes, afraid that they'll do something wrong. Those situations, however, are opportunities to exercise our baptismal covenant. Sure, mistakes will be made, that's just normal.

Following the call to step out of oneself is not easy, and when the stakes are high it's even more difficult. Just look at these stakes Jesus names in the gospel today. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. The charge is given to Peter, but then expanded in Matthew 18 to all the disciples, to the Church at large. The Church is given a tremendous power here. To think that we as a church have the daunting power to tie up or to unleash sins, judgments, spirits, persons. And that such bindings and loosings remain so throughout eternity. Such power would scare many into a hole!

Except maybe for Peter. I've often wondered if Peter and the likes of Peter are brave and courageous or just plain stupid. Jesus does call the guy Rock for nothing.

I want to make one thing clear: never should the power given to us in creation be abused. Power to bind and loose has been abused time and again by human beings throughout the ages. Many of the world's most heinous catastrophes have come from abuse of power or human arrogance. The church is notorious for having abused the power it was given.

But just as disastrous is when well-intentioned women and men do not exercise their God-given power to bind and loose, to make pro-active decisions that affect the well-being of the earth and the

heavens. Human negligence is every bit as much of a problem as abuse of power.

I invite you this day to follow our brother Rock Peter's lead. It is the likes of him, and the likes of us, in our weaknesses and strengths and in our wholeness, upon which the church is built and continues. Let's give it a shot. I believe that if you and I and we together can act humbly and reverently on the power we have been given, listening carefully for the correctives so we can stay on the right track, that we will one day get it profoundly right. We will know that Jesus is indeed the Messiah who has come among us in Word, in Sacrament of bread and wine, in healing oil and bumbling fellow Christians, to offer salvation for all.