

Wandering Heart

Figuring out faith with Peter

A Sermon Planning Guide for Lent-Easter

Featuring Biblical commentary by
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Guide developed by Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Introduction

How to Use this Guide

We hope this guide is your starting point for shaping your sermons, worship services, and scripture study classes. For each Sunday in Lent through the Second Sunday of Easter, we have included theme connections, biblical commentary, guiding questions, and links to further reading and materials.¹ We hope these offer a few ways of approaching and thinking about the texts in light of our theme and weekly sub-themes. We encourage you to use this guide as a companion to the poetry, visual art, devotional, and materials in the bundle—allowing all of the words, images, and ideas to cross-pollinate. You can find full-length artist statements inspired by each of the focal texts listed in this guide in our Visual Art Collection. Consider mapping out your ideas in our accompanying Sermon Planning Grid. Additionally, you might use this guide to facilitate adult education sessions or small groups. You could absorb and discuss some of the articles and materials noted in the “Further Reading and Research” with a small group. You could also adapt or use the guiding questions as discussion prompts.

About this Series

This Lent, we are focusing on the life and faith of one of Jesus’ most famous disciples. In Peter, we see a person who is both steadfast and unsteady, a dear friend and a betrayer, a follower and a wanderer. In Peter, we often see ourselves. By following Peter’s journey, we watch the story of Jesus unfold through the eyes of a very normal human trying to figure it all out—just like us.

As we were studying Peter’s faith journey, the lyrics of “Come Thou Fount”² came to mind. It’s as if Peter himself wrote this song. And so, for each step in Peter’s journey, we have selected a phrase from this hymn. As we follow Peter’s story, we will sing our way through Lent, binding our wandering hearts to God.

In this series, we want to affirm that faith is a constant journey of steadfast pursuit, one that ebbs and flows. We want to affirm that wandering is exploration, not necessarily distance from God. We want to affirm the ways Peter keeps going: he drops his nets, he walks on water, he runs to the empty tomb, he swims to the shore to meet the risen Christ. He keeps searching and yearning and loving, even after missteps or mistakes. Ultimately, in Peter’s story, we are reminded that God loves imperfect people—in fact, time and again, that’s precisely who God claims and calls.

This Lent, we will look for ourselves in the stepping stones of Peter’s story. We will reflect on the stages of our own faith journeys as well as who and what has shaped us along the way. As we wander, let us tune our hearts to sing God’s grace. May we rest in streams of mercy, never ceasing.

¹ Under the “Further Reading and Research” sections, we direct you to the work of authors, scholars, thinkers, and writers who might inform or enhance your sermonic message. We do not own the rights to these works. We encourage you to patronize and support these authors and creators.

² “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” Author: Robert Robinson (1758); Alterer: Martin Madan (1760). Tune: NETTLETON. Public domain.

Introduction *(continued)*

About the Theme

Like many of us, Peter has a wandering heart. His journey is not polished, or linear, or perfect, but he is always tethered to the love of God. When you look closely at Peter's story, you find Jesus at each step along the way—offering him abundance, catching him when he begins to sink, challenging him when he stands in the way, washing his feet, predicting his betrayal, and offering him *agapē* love. This Lent, we're joining Peter in figuring out faith. We're not idolizing or vilifying him; instead, we're hoping to wander alongside him, open to what we might learn about Jesus (and ourselves) by stepping in his shoes.

Theme Reflections from the Sanctified Art Creative Team

"If you picked up a novel and read the chapters out of order, most would shriek in shock and confusion! However, that is exactly how I was taught the story of Peter over the years: scattered like sprinkles on a cake. I learned Peter's stories out of order and over time, Peter became nothing more than a background character in a vacation bible school skit. Last year, however, something about Peter's story began to tug on me. I began studying this hopeful human in earnest; for the first time, I found myself deeply connected to this complicated and eager disciple of Christ. In Peter's passion, I saw my own conviction. In Peter's walking, sinking, and question-asking, I saw my own learning. And in Peter's wandering, I saw my own growing pains in faith. So this Lent, I am thrilled to slip into Peter's shoes and walk the road that he walked. This story was never meant to be sprinkles on top of the cake. This story is our story. Come wander, come learn, come discover with us."

—Rev. Sarah Speed, Founding Creative Partner

"When we read the stories of the New Testament, many of us might imagine we are audience members watching an ancient play—except we are watching it all play out 2,000 years later in a different culture and time. In this series, it's as if we're stepping onto the stage, placing ourselves in the action. We might imagine ourselves as the understudy for Peter. This Lent, we're learning his lines, imagining his motives, and discerning his every move. We're placing ourselves in his shoes. In this way, we're experiencing the story of Jesus, not as a distant audience member, but as one who is intimately connected to the plot. We're joining the cast. But why focus on Peter? Because, after Jesus, he is the most frequently mentioned individual in the Gospels and New Testament. He is a consistent presence throughout Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Through him, we imagine ourselves dropping our nets to follow a new call. We imagine ourselves walking on water, being rebuked, learning about forgiveness, receiving foot washing, betraying our friend, and despite it all, experiencing redeeming love. This Lent, let's step onto the stage and see what unfolds."

—Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity, Founder, Creative Director

"I'm a heart-on-my sleeve kind of person. My emotions often take the lead as I find my way through this life, and sometimes it works out and other times it doesn't. As we engaged with Peter's narrative, I realized that Peter is a heart-on-his-sleeve kind of person too. He follows his heart and does so passionately and with gusto. This doesn't always work out for Peter, but he keeps moving forward, doing his best in following his friend and teacher, Jesus. The result of his wandering gives us a picture of an authentic, imperfect, heart-forward faith journey. I want to be present like Peter—to orient my life toward God's will, to ask for help when I'm sinking, to celebrate the moments of clarity, to pause when I'm not quite getting it, to be open to learning and redirection, to receive gifts with humility, to acknowledge devastating missteps and repent, to run toward hope, and to feel the freedom that is found in abundant, astounding grace. At the end of the journey, I don't want it to be perfect. I just want to be able to say that I loved, and I loved well."

—Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman, Director of Branding, Founding Creative Partner

Introduction *(continued)*

Theme Reflections from the Sanctified Art Creative Team *(continued)*

“My biggest fear has always been making an irreparable mistake. (*The phrase, “You only live once!” has always made me anxious, not impulsive.*) Afraid of veering from the straight and narrow path I believed God had set before me, I mourned every person, every major, every career I left behind as wasted time—time I could have spent more efficiently toward some imagined destination. But then I think of my father, a jack-of-all-trades (*and master of plenty*) who has been, among other things: a carpenter, a software developer, a cattle rancher, an English professor, and a church finance administrator. I don’t look at his life and see any of my own fears—I see a fascinating person, shaped by all the places he’s been and all the varied lives he’s led. What if I could view my own wandering path with such compassion? What if I could let go of my anxiety about reaching an imagined destination and enjoy the journey instead? What if I could lay down my perfectionism so I could embrace the beauty of imperfection? Maybe Peter can teach me something this Lent about wandering toward God.” —**Rev. Anna Strickland, Operations Support & Content Creator**

“I am drawn to this theme because life seems to be an evolution of faith. I see myself in Peter’s reality in numerous ways. Lines from “Come Thou Fount” take me back to my childhood. My grandfather would always be ready first on Sunday mornings. In his suit and tie he would call us to our Sunday best in his own subtle way. Sitting at the upright piano in the corner of the great room, he would begin to play. Hymns with historic nostalgia in my family’s faith tradition would resonate throughout the house. Every time I hear them played, referenced, or quoted, I’m there at the farm, watching the sun climb through the picture window, and waiting... waiting for everyone to be ready on those Sunday mornings. From there, my faith journey has been long and arduous. I have taken every detour that Peter has. I have received every judgment that Jesus delivers, among many others. So why do I lean into organized religion? Perhaps it’s some combination of the nostalgia of those piano Sunday mornings. It’s probably the justice work that my church is incredibly dedicated to. Or is it that, at church, I can give my gifts as an artist? Maybe it’s the expansive faith and grace I see in the very human life and faith of Peter; in him, I also see myself. I’m not sure why, but I’m there... every Sunday morning.” —**Hannah Garrity, Founding Creative Partner**

About Our Focal Scriptures

For this series, we have selected focal texts that focus on the significant moments in Peter’s journey—from becoming a disciple to meeting the risen Christ. For the five weeks of Lent, we have paired these narratives with psalms from the RCL (Year B). Each psalm may feel like Peter’s prayer for the week, as well as our own.

Introduction *(continued)*

General Reading & Listening Recommendations for this Series

We encourage you to acquire and absorb these materials before the season of Lent begins, as each of these may inform your meditations on our theme and weekly sub-themes. The books included in this list are referenced throughout this guide.

Read *The Life and Witness of Peter*, by Larry R. Helyer. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).
(Note: We sifted through several books on Peter when developing this series. This one is our top recommendation, as it provides important historical and textual information in a way that is accessible for preaching and teaching. Specific chapters are recommended throughout this guide.)

Read *Freeing Jesus: Rediscovering Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way, and Presence*, by Diana Butler Bass. (Harper Collins, 2021).
(Note: By stepping into Peter's shoes, we are rediscovering Jesus this Lent. This book presents Jesus as multifaceted—as one who shows us the “heart of God,” and invites us into deep, joyful, interdependent relationship. We have recommended several chapters throughout this guide when they are relevant to the weekly scriptures and themes.)

Read *Faith After Doubt: Why Your Beliefs Stopped Working and What To Do About It*, by Brian D. McLaren. (New York: St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2021).
(Note: While preaching this series, you may want to refer to stages of faith theories. There are several paradigms you can research, such as the ones developed by James Fowler, Richard Rohr, and Nicola Slee, for example. McLaren researched many theories for human and faith development and synthesized the patterns he saw into four stages of faith: Simplicity, Complexity, Perplexity, and Harmony.³ He describes these stages in detail in this book. In this guide, we reference McLaren's stages of faith, as they might be helpful tools for preaching and teaching.)

Watch *American Symphony*, a Netflix Documentary. Directed and produced by Matthew Heineman, starring Jon Batiste. Netflix. Released November 29, 2023. netflix.com/title/81728930/
(Note: This moving documentary follows the life and career of the prolific musician, Jon Batiste. While his career swells with awards and creative projects, his wife pursues treatment for leukemia. The film explores the triumphs and turmoil of a year filled with extreme highs and lows. Throughout, viewers witness Batiste's enduring faith and inspiring creative spirit. There are several ways this film resonates with this series, as Batiste shows us a steadfast, heart-forward faith in the midst of a wandering journey.)

³ On his website, Brian McLaren offers a free download outlining his four stages of faith. You can download the chart here: brianmclaren.net/four-stages-of-faith-development-chart/



THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Wandering Heart: "Jesus sought me"

Focal Scriptures LUKE 5:1-11 | PSALM 25:1-10

Theme Connections

Jesus doesn't seek out trained rabbis and priests to be his disciples; instead, he calls a few Galilean fishermen to follow him and join his ministry. In this story, Jesus tells Simon Peter to drop his nets one more time, even though they've been fishing all night long and have caught nothing. To their surprise, they haul in nets bursting with fish. In response to this abundant miracle, Peter says, "Go away from me, Lord!" And yet, Peter and his partners drop their nets and follow Jesus. What is the beginning of your faith story? When has God sought you out? Have you ever felt like your calling was pursuing—or chasing—you? Did you resist? Did you follow?

Considerations for this Week

As you begin this series, we encourage you to spend some time introducing Peter. You could explore the "many faces" of Peter, diving into the varied ways he has been represented in different cultures and religious communities. You might delve into Peter's background—piecing together historical and imagined details about his life. We also hope you will introduce the theme for the season and how each of the weeks are inspired by a Peter story as well as a verse from "Come Thou Fount." Additionally, if moving away from the lectionary during Lent is new for your congregation, you might emphasize why following Peter's story can be a meaningful way to journey through the Lenten season. Peter's discipleship journey can provide a mirror for our own; we can learn from him, but mostly, we watch the story of Jesus unfold through his experiences. Like Peter, we are invited to bring the best (and worst) parts of ourselves to God.

Commentary on Luke 5:1-11 & Psalm 25:1-10 | by Dr. Terence Lester

Amid the global pandemic, we faced uncertainties and fear. The world was gripped by a new, invisible foe. I lead a nonprofit named *Love Beyond Walls* that advocates for the unhoused. During COVID-19, Demetri—whose name is forever etched in my memory—walked into our center. He was a community member and friend, but he seemed different. We asked what was on his mind, and he replied, "I believe I'm going to die because I have nowhere to wash my hands. How am I supposed to wash my hands when I don't have anywhere to go?"

His words showed the harsh reality for those experiencing homelessness: over half a million people held the same fear. COVID-19 was an awakening to the longstanding disparities within society. The term "social distancing" was jarring for people who had long known social distancing.

Demetri's story fueled a national campaign we called "Love Sinks In" to provide handwashing access for those without it, enabling us to connect more deeply and stand with our community. As others focused on hand hygiene and quarantine, we provided basic sanitation for those experiencing homelessness. Many debated toilet paper and confinement; we stood with individuals without soap, water, or shelter.

Just as Jesus sought out the Galilean fishermen, we sought out people suffering on the streets. Galilee, now modern-day northern Israel, hosted a diverse community and some struggled with poverty. Fishing was commonplace, and for many, a means of subsistence. Those whose fishing did not succeed often became destitute. Just as Jesus called the fishermen, he calls us to seek the marginalized, to become "fishers of men." Demetri's plea echoed Peter's response to Jesus' call: "I'm afraid." But it was also a call to action.

(continued)



Commentary on Luke 5:1-11 & Psalm 25:1-10 | by Dr. Terence Lester (continued)

Peter had a wandering heart. Jesus was always there to catch Peter, to walk beside him, to wash his feet, and to offer love. In Peter's story, we find Jesus. Peter's wandering faith ebbed and flowed, pushed away and pulled close. But he was always tethered to the love of God. This Lent, we're joining Peter in figuring out faith. We will wander alongside him, glimpsing Jesus through his eyes.

When we allow ourselves to be afraid and vulnerable, God's love washes our wandering hearts. We washed hands during COVID-19, but God's love showers us with calm, connection, and belonging amid upheaval. In the midst of fear and uncertainty, Jesus brought calm. He reminded us that God is with us. Jesus formed a community willing to follow. "Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long" (Psalm 25:1-10). In despair, we found hope; in fear, we found peace.

As we contemplate Luke 5:1-11, let us hold Demetri and others like him in our hearts. In crisis, *Love Beyond Walls* responded with compassion and love, and so, we too were found by the Divine, and the narrative of our lives became a testament to God's grace.

Guiding Q's

- Write a backstory for Peter based on historical and cultural information, as well as details you imagine about his life. What do you imagine about his faith story? What are his hopes and dreams? What are his daily challenges? What are his impressions of Jesus?
- In Luke 4:38-39, just before this encounter, Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law. If Simon Peter has already witnessed Jesus performing a miracle, why does he initially question Jesus' command to drop his nets? (Luke 5:4-5) Is witnessing this second miracle why Peter becomes willing to drop everything and follow Jesus?
- Pay close attention to all of the action and spatial details in Luke 5:1-11. Bring the scene to life in your imagination. How big is the crowd pressing in on Jesus? (Luke 5:1) How far from land is Jesus when he teaches the crowd from Simon's boat? (Luke 5:3) How far out is the "deep water" where Simon casts his nets? (Luke 5:4) What fishing methods are being used? Does the crowd witness Peter's passionate confession? (Luke 5:8) What happens to all of the caught fish? (Luke 5:11)
- Why does Peter resist the abundant catch of fish? (Luke 5:8)⁴ Does he feel unworthy to receive a gift he has not worked hard for? Is he afraid there could be repercussions from the Roman government, and that this abundant catch may lead to higher taxes and fines for his business? As a Galilean fisherman who likely lived scarcely, does seeing this abundance feel jarring and unfamiliar? Does he consider himself "unfaithful" and therefore he resists being in Jesus' presence? When have you been offered an abundant gift? Did you feel any urge to resist it? If so, why?
- This is a dramatic turning point for Peter. He will leave his home, his business, and his way of life to follow Jesus into a new calling. Have you ever pivoted your life in order to follow a new calling? What did you leave behind? How did that new path unfold? Where was God along the way?
- What is the beginning of your faith story? What are the first things you were taught about God? When was the first time you felt God's presence?

⁴ Peter's reaction is similar to some of the prophets when they receive divine callings: Moses (Exodus 3:5-6), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5), and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:28).



THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Wandering Heart: "Jesus sought me" (continued)

Further Reading & Research

Read "Chapter 1: Background of Simon Peter" in *The Life and Witness of Peter*, by Larry R. Helyer. (Illinois: IVP Academic, 2012). 19-31.

(Note: This chapter provides an in-depth overview of Peter's background. It includes contextual information about his commercial fishing business, the fishing industry and methods, as well as the economic ramifications of running a business controlled by Roman elites.)

Read "Why one organization is placing sanitation units under bridges and in Atlanta's parks" by Curtis Bunn. *NBC NEWS*. April 6, 2021. [nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/one-organization-placing-sanitation-units-bridges-atlantas-parks-rcna601](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/one-organization-placing-sanitation-units-bridges-atlantas-parks-rcna601)

(Note: This article tells more of the story behind the "Love Sinks In" campaign that Dr. Lester references in his commentary. It also touches on Lester's background as a young man and how, when he was facing a possible prison sentence, a judge surprisingly granted him a second chance, which rerouted his life.)

Read "Chapter 1: Friend" in *Freeing Jesus: Rediscovering Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way, and Presence*, by Diana Butler Bass. (Harper Collins, 2021). 1-25.

(Note: In this book, Butler Bass helps us rediscover Jesus in multifaceted ways. Her reflections invite readers to depart from narrow definitions and culture wars and reacquaint ourselves with Jesus as a loving companion in our faith journey. This chapter delves into Jesus as "friend." She asserts that friendship—joyful, free, and interdependent—is "the passionate desire of God" (15). As we step into Peter's shoes, we imagine what it must be like to drop your nets and follow Jesus—not as a master, but as a trustworthy companion.)



River of Grace

by Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Inspired by Luke 5:1-11