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Message: Amazing Grace – Peter

Speaker: Mark Connelly

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The bible is not the story of amazing people. It's the story of God showing amazing grace to messy people (repeat). That's good news for everyone in the room today, because whether we want to admit it or not...**we're all a mess.**

I know I called us all prostitutes week #1 in our new building, and this week I'm calling us all a mess. But it's actually very freeing when you understand that. It's freeing to come to the knowledge that you're marriage isn't the union of two amazing people, it's the union of two messy people who desperately need grace. If you never get that, you're marriage is going to be very disappointing, and you might end up hopping from one to another looking for something you'll never find. It's freeing to come to the knowledge that Mission Community Church is not the collection of 4,000 amazing people. It's the gathering of 4,000 very messy people. If you don't get that you're going to be spiritually thrown when someone acts like a pagan in our parking lot. And it's freeing to know this book is not the story of amazing people, but of amazing grace given to messy people. When you understand that, you're in a position to be honest about yourself and to receive the freedom that can only come from God's grace.

One of my favorite chapters in the bible is Hebrews 11. Heb 11 is sort of the Old Testament hall of fame. It's the writer of scripture pulling the best examples from the entire Old Testament, thousands of years of biblical history, thousands of people to choose from, and the writer of scripture singles out this handful as the models of faithfulness. Check out who's on the list, **v.7, Noah**. At the time, Noah was the only righteous man on the planet, and God rescued both him and his family from the flood. When the flood receded God made a covenant with him. We see the God-given reminder of that covenant every time we look at a rainbow. Great stuff, but now for the rest of the story... just 3 verses later in Genesis, we read this...then Noah, a man of the soil, planted a vineyard, drank his wine and got blasted, so blasted he passed out naked. One of his son's, Ham, walked up and saw dad buck naked, and went and told the other 2 boys. Then when Noah woke up from his drunken stupor, he cursed Ham and all his future kids for embarrassing him. Now, can we just be honest, when dad wakes up hung over and starts passing down generational curses, it's time for family counseling. If Noah was here today, he'd be coming to Celebrate Recovery. He'd be like, *'hi, I'm Noah, I'm a believer who struggles with alcohol and anger.'* Noah was messy. His life was a mixed bag of faithfulness and failure.

The next dude in the Hebrews 11 hall of fame is Abraham. **Vv.8-10, 17-19, Abraham** did so many godly things, like dropping everything to obediently go into the land he knew nothing about; like being faithful even willing to offer up his son if need be. And God made profound promises to Abraham to bless the entire world through him. Great stuff, but now for the rest of the story... just 6 verses later in Genesis, after God made those great promises to Abraham, he finds himself heading into Egypt, and he pulls his wife aside and says... *'hey babe, listen, you are so hot. You have legs that just won't quit and your breasts are like the twin fawns of the gazelle. In fact, you're so hot, I'm*

*afraid when Pharaoh sees you, he's gonna kill me to have you. Soooo, here's what I'm thinking, let's just say you're my sister. That way, Pharaoh will take you into his harem, but at least I'll be treated well. Are you cool with that?' It doesn't say this in the text, but I'm pretty sure she hit him in the head with a frying pan. Abraham was messy. His life was a mixed bag of faithfulness and failure. I could keep going down the hall of fame list...**v.20** Isaac did the same thing to his wife as his father Abraham. **V.21**, Jacob was an outright liar and gained his birthright through deception. **V.24-25**, Moses killed a man in anger. **V.32** Gideon led people into idolatry, Samson was a womanizer. David, so loved another man's wife, he had him murdered to keep his affair going. These are the people in the spiritual hall of fame. **Apparently this book isn't the story of amazing, flawless people. It's about God showing amazing grace to messy people.***

And I'm so thankful for that, because I'm a messy people. My life is a mixed bag of faithfulness and failure.

At times I've shepherded the church with masterful precision then fathered my children with careless oblivion.

At times I've preached a sermon with carefully crafted words then hurt a friend with poorly worded foolishness.

At times I've poured myself out for the good of the church while leaving my wife feeling neglected and alone.

(I literally poured myself out to get us to this next chapter as a church. After services last Sunday I was so fried, I told Kay I just need to go get a video and vegetate. So I left the parking lot, went to blockbuster, picked out a movie. But I didn't have my ID on me so the clerk said he just needed me to tell him my address. For the life of me I couldn't remember where I've lived for the past five years. I left the store completely stumped!)

My life is messy. It's a mixed bag of faithfulness and failure. If you're honest, isn't that your story to. ***The good news today for those in Christ, is God doesn't define you by your failures, he defines you by his grace. And God's grace will always be bigger than your failure. Whatever oppressive burden of guilt you carry into this place from whatever failure you've lived out, by God's grace you can be released and restored.***

To help us see this truth today I want us to follow the story of one man, the apostle Peter, and see what happens when amazing grace meets human failure (**Mat 14**). Peter's life was a mixed bag of faithfulness and failure.

One on occasion Jesus walks on water in the midst of a storm, and the apostles are freaked out...**Mt 14:25-31**. Peter took a great step of faith. He was the only one willing to get out of the boat. For a moment, he's actually walking on water, eyes fixed on Jesus. But in a matter of seconds his faith started shaking and Peter started drowning. Jesus rescued him, but notice, faithfulness was followed by failure. Isn't that so often the case, moral or spiritual failure coming right on the heels of some fantastic success.

Mt 16:13-18...what a great step of faith. The teachers and leaders of Judaism were rejecting Jesus as the Christ. Others were confused. People were trying to figure out who this miracle worker was. Some thought he was a prophet. Some thought he was Elijah or Jeremiah, risen from the dead. But Peter gets it right. *"You are the Christ, the promised one, the Son of the Living God."* Jesus is so pleased with Peter's faith he says, 'Peter, you're a rock and on this rock I will build my church.'

But look what happens in the very next passage, **vv.21-23**. Jesus lays out his plan to rescue the world, he would willingly go to a cross to die for our sins. Then he would victoriously rise from the

dead 3 days later as Lord of lords. That's why Jesus came, his entire life was building to that point, and as he was clearly laying out the plan to the disciples, Peter calls Jesus over, *the giver of life, the holy one sent from God*, and privately rebukes him for his flawed plan. Peter's like..no, no Jesus, let me tell you how it should go down.

Jesus looks Peter in the eyes and says...*Step off Satan. You're a stumbling block to me, and you're just thinking about you.* How's that for a fall...from rockstar to Satan follower! His life was a mixed bag of faithfulness followed by failure.

But the biggest failure of his life was just around the corner. Mat 26, the scene is the last supper. Jesus, the night before the cross, is having a final Passover meal with his disciples. **Vv.31-35**, Peter professes this great faith, *'everyone else might fall, but not me. I'm ready to die for you Jesus. Bring on the army, I'll fight em off.'* And he tried, that very night he chopped the ear off a Roman soldier who was trying to take Jesus away. That's a pretty amazing faith. I'll give you one guess what followed right behind his faithfulness...**failure.**

vv.69-75, can we just pause here and recognize the magnitude of this failure. As Jesus is being beaten and spit upon and tortured, Peter not only denies being an apostle, he denies ever even knowing Jesus, even going so far to call down curses on himself if he's lying. From Luke's account we know Jesus could see and hear exactly what Peter was doing. On the failure Richter scale that's a 9.5. That's the kind of failure that can send you reeling for a lifetime. It's the kind of failure that can define you from that point forward.

If we're honest, we've all had that kind of spiritual failure in our lives. We've all done something(s) that we're so ashamed of, or we should be...something if everyone knew, we'd just have to move. All of us have failed on the scale of Peter. For many here, that failure is defining you. You're carrying the burden of shame, and it's robbing you of joy, or of experiencing the freedom God wants for you. Spiritual failures can be crushing.

Let's see what happens when amazing grace meets massive failure, Jn 21 (context Jesus, post resurrection appears to his disciples on several occasions. On this occasion Peter and several apostles were out fishing when Jesus came to them again. They had breakfast on the beach) **Jn 21:15-17.**

Jesus makes a point of coming to Peter personally and restoring him. Jesus already knew the answer to his question. He wasn't asking Peter because he was uncertain. He asked Peter three times if he loved him, because he wanted Peter to be certain. He wanted Peter to be reaffirmed, face to face. And every time Peter affirmed his love for Jesus, Jesus extended grace and restored him. Feed my sheep, tend my flock, feed my sheep. Jesus was saying to Peter, *'I know you've failed miserably, but I forgive you, and I trust you. Don't let that failure define you, let my grace define you, and go forward with confidence.'*

And that's exactly what Peter did. He didn't let his failure define him; he let God's grace define him. And he went on to become the leader of the early church. The first sermon of the church was delivered by Peter. The first post-Jesus miracle of the early church was performed by Peter. The first church council was led by Peter. He wrote two of the letters of our New Testament, 1 & 2 Peter. In fact, after Jesus restored Peter, there isn't a single mention of Peter's denial. You see, he wasn't defined by his failure, he was defined by God's grace.

Let's take home two freeing truths about grace today...

1/ God's not surprised by your failure and he doesn't define you by them. He choose you and saved you and made you his, fully informed of what he was getting into. Notice what he said to Peter at the last supper, not **if** you disown me, but **'you will** disown me.' Jesus knew full well of

Peter's sin, long before it happened. On that first day, when Jesus saw Peter fishing, and he said, 'come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' He knew full well that Peter would disown him three times. But still he chose him. Do you know why God chooses to work through messy people...because there's no other kind.

Some of you struggle with this personal theology that haunts you, and it goes something like this...grace is the free gift of forgiveness God gives for all our sin prior to faith in Jesus. But now that I claim to be a follower of Jesus, I stay in a position of grace through my obedience. And the problem is you've sinned big since becoming a Christian, so you're doubting God's forgiveness and wondering how grace applies to post salvation sins. If that's you let me remind you, every sin you read about of Peter in the bible, was a post salvation sin. They all came after Jesus chose him to be an apostle, after he left everything to follow Jesus. Jesus knew it all, and chose him anyway. If you haven't failed big since becoming a Christian, you haven't been a Christian very long. But God defines you by his grace, not by your failure. Christian, stop dragging your butt around like you're too ugly to be forgiven, that's not how God sees you. He still trusts you.

2/ God's grace is bigger than your failure. Peter's failure was big, But God's grace is bigger. My sin and your sin is big, but God's grace is bigger. **"The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more."** Romans 5:20

Your sin is big, my sin is big, but God's grace is bigger. That's the only way scripture can say this, **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Romans 8:1. That's only true if God's grace is always bigger than my failure. If at any point my failure could be bigger than God's grace, then there would be condemnation for me as a Christian. But God's word says, that's not possible for you followers of Jesus. There is no condemnation for you, not because your sin is small, but because God's grace is big. The payment Jesus made on the cross is more than enough to cover the cost of your sin.