

The Best Laid Plans  
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Scripture: John 21:14-19

Modern people like to plan

- Careers
- Families
- Vacations
- Retirement

But sometimes even the best laid plans fail.

When I was in high school I was kind of on the Academic “B” team. My grades were always good enough to be elected to Honor Society, but I must have lacked some sort of social skills or something because I was never let in to that esteemed group until the end of my senior year, when their rules forced them to admit me.

But in my junior year, Honor Society was short on people to act as Junior Attendants to graduation, so, along with several of my fellow “B listers” I was tapped. For those of you unfamiliar with the “honor”, what the job entailed was shepherding the seniors into the auditorium, making sure they stood up and sat down at the right time, and generally just keeping them in line.

Now being less than first string, I didn’t get any of the plum row assignments of course. No row with last names starting in J-L for me. Marcy Rivera, my “right hand” attendant and I got assigned to the Work Experience row.

Work Experience was a program at the High School that gave academic credit to students for their work in ordinary jobs – it was in essence an alternative track to a high school diploma. And being “B list” academics, Marci and I had our prejudices – we were sure these were slow kids, in desperate need of our special attention. I’ve since learned that one of the students is now a successful corporate lawyer in Chicago, and another a Vice President at Microsoft – another youthful prejudice dashed to pieces.

But in any case, Marcy and I were determined to do our job right – I guess we really wanted to impress the powers that were in Honor Society. The catch was this – The Work Experience students were seated in the last row of the auditorium. And the last row had to stand up first, and start the parade up to receive diplomas.

So Marcy and I were determined that we would see that it was done right. At the end of the afternoon rehearsal, she and I took our row aside and explained to them the plan for the ceremony. They were to listen for the Jeffco School administrator, who was delivering the commencement address say the words, “Stand Up and Receive Your Diplomas”. When they heard those words, they were to smartly, as a row, stand up, and file out to proceed to the stage.

That evening, about, oh I would guess 1/3 of the way in to his address, the Jeffco Schools Administrator said the fateful words, and I quote:

“In a few moments you’ll be standing up to receive your diplomas”.

You guessed it; as a group our row proudly stood up, which was followed by Marcy and I desperately trying to get them to sit back down. Soon other graduates, following their lead, began to stand in scattered places around the floor, followed by their attendants desperately trying to get them to be seated.

To this day, I think, the School Administrator and a good chunk of the audience thinks it was some sort of poorly thought out haphazard political protest.

So what are we supposed to think about planning?

The bible makes it clear that planning is a good thing. We're told in Proverbs that a wise man stores up grain, a wise woman plans for the benefit of her self and her family.

But the Bible also makes clear that plans can become our God when they become the central focus of our life, when they exclude God and allow no possibility for God-led change. Our plans can become almost an idol – and God has a way of destroying idols.

The apostle Peter was a man who liked to make plans. But sometimes those plans got in the way of him being an effective follower of Jesus. And the stories in the bible of Peter show Jesus constantly throwing a wrench into Peter's well laid out plans. Jesus changed those plans in order to Call Peter, To Correct Peter, and ultimately to restore and reconcile and save Peter.

When we first meet Peter (he was still called Simon then) in the Gospel accounts, we see Simon living out his life plans. Simon was a fisherman, and in that era and in that place, we are probably correct in assuming that he comes from a long line of fishermen. And we see Simon at work; the book of Matthew tells us he was fishing on the Sea of Galilee with his brother Andrew.

I think Simon had a career plan; be a successful fisherman, own several boats, have a family, and live a nice stable, uneventful life on the shores of Galilee. But then he met Jesus. And those plans flew out the window. Let's listen to the account of that encounter from the Book of Matthew 4:18-20:

**18-20 Walking along the beach of Lake Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers: Simon (later called Peter) and Andrew. They were fishing, throwing their nets into the lake. It was their regular work. Jesus said to them, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass." They didn't ask questions, but simply dropped their nets and followed.**

So God, through Jesus, called Simon. Jesus called Simon to a life of discipleship and sacrifice, without earthly rewards. And Simon became Peter, and his earlier plans were gone. And in their place was a roller coaster, a ride that would see Peter next to Jesus as thousands thronged and clamored for healing and for teaching. As thousands hailed Jesus as the Messiah, the long awaited anointed one. And as Peter, filled at first with false bravado, soon to be replaced with dread and fear and cowardice watched the events of Holy Week and Good Friday unfold.

You know, God can still change our plans in order to call us. I think of Albert Schweitzer, a famous foreign missionary, theologian and musician from the 1900's. At the dawn of the 1900's, Albert Schweitzer received his doctorate in Theological Studies, at the age of 25. But that came at the same time he was serving as pastor in one of the most prestigious churches in Strasborg, in addition to pursuing his career as an internationally renowned touring concert organist.

Albert Schweitzer had plans. You see, he came from a long line of distinguished theological professors, of pastors at prominent churches throughout Germany and France, and of church musicians. He could have chosen a career in any of the three areas, and been successful, been happy. He was in fact successfully mixing all three areas. But in 1905 he felt a distinct call, a God led change of plans. He felt a calling to become a medical missionary to Africa, so he entered medical school. In 1913, on his graduation, he established a medical mission and hospital in French Equatorial Africa. He was imprisoned by German occupation for several years during World War I, but

following the war, he reopened and rebuilt the hospital, resuming his concert touring to raise funds for the mission.

Schweitzer spent the majority of the rest of his life in Africa, ultimately winning the Nobel peace prize in 1962 in recognition for his life of service. How different would Albert Schweitzer's life have been if he hadn't heard, or chose to ignore God's call to a change of plans. How different would life have been in that region of Africa?

Secondly, I think God changes our plans when He wants to correct us, to put us back on the right path. Let's go back to the Bible, to one of my favorite stories of Peter. It's the story of the Transfiguration, where Jesus along with Peter, James and John climb the mountain, and Peter glimpses what the Gospel refers to as the Glory of God revealed in Jesus. And Peter sees Jesus talking with the glorified presences of Moses and Elijah. You know its one of those scenes that I think we really can't understand or describe with human words. And speaking personally, I think it would have left me speechless. But not Peter – Peter always knew just the wrong time to open his mouth, just the wrong thing to say. I think that's why I like him so much.

So Peter sees what no human has ever seen, the Glory of God revealed in humanity, maybe the most direct vision of God ever! And his response? He says to Jesus, "Hey, I have an idea. Let's build some tents, and you and Elijah and Moses and I can just kind of camp out and have a cool time here on the mountain!" Not exactly what God had in mind. And that scene ends with God literally interrupting Peter, saying "This is my Son, The Beloved . . . LISTEN TO HIM!"

So we see, God can change our plans, correct our paths when we start to go astray. When we base our plans on the wrong ideas, on mistaken assumptions, on misguided good intentions.

John Newton was following in his father's footsteps. After a rocky start to a career as a seaman, which included attempted mutiny, lashings, demotion and enforced servitude, John Newton found himself in a career as an officer on a ship. A ship whose business was the slave

trade. Sailing from the coast of Sierra Leone in Africa, its hold filled with hundreds of innocent human beings, wrenched from their African home and destined for slavery and misery in the new world. Trip after trip after trip . . . but the money was good.

In 1749 God began to work on John Newton. After nearly drowning at sea, Newton began to study the scriptures, and he sensed a call from God. Within 5 years he had abandoned the slave trade, and was on the path to becoming an Anglican priest. He joined forces with the likes of William Wilberforce and John Wesley to campaign against the slave trade, carrying the burden of his youthful career with him always. But he's most known now as the author of the hymn "Amazing Grace", and the story of his interactions with William Wilberforce are recounted in the recent movie by the same name. Let's watch:

#### PLAY CLIP OF AMAZING GRACE

Old, tired, blind and disabled, John Newton is able to acknowledge the redemption of God. The irony of a man, nearly blind, being able to honestly say:

"I once was blind, but NOW I see"

Finally, God is ready and willing to change our plans when we're ready to be reconciled to God, when we're ready to accept God's saving grace. Let's return to the story of Peter that we heard as the scripture lesson this morning. Consider the events that led up to this scene. Peter, after having declared with false bravado that he would never deny Jesus, in fact denies him 3 times, just as Jesus had predicted.

Peter in the course of 24 hours had gone from the man defending Jesus by the sword in the Garden of Gethsemane to a man cowering in fear, trembling that he would be "found out". And here we find him, his

dreams forgotten, **his** plans of being by the side of a triumphant Messiah who liberates the oppressed Jewish people shattered.

Peter has returned to fishing. Passages in the gospels indicate that Peter had seen the resurrected Jesus in one of His 2 earlier appearances. But it didn't impact him – he still felt estranged, he still felt his actions on that Thursday night had forever separated him from the Messiah, and ultimately from God. Doubting Thomas had seen the risen Christ, put his hand on the wounds on Jesus' hands and side, and proclaimed "My Lord and My God!". But Peter wasn't there, Peter wasn't saying that. In John, just before the passage we read this morning, Peter proclaims both his separation and his future, and he says, "I'm going fishing".

To the same occupation on the same lake where Jesus had first called him. As if nothing had happened in the previous 3 years. The man whom Jesus had called the Rock, the head of the church, was defeated. Peter could not face his own denials, his own betrayals his own failures. Peter is a lot like all of us.

So Jesus met Peter on that beach. Jesus interrupted Peter's work day. And Jesus took Peter aside, and just as Peter had 3 times denied and betrayed Jesus, 3 times Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, 3 times Jesus offered reconciliation and forgiveness and hope. Jesus restored Peter that morning; Peter did as Jesus commanded – he fed Jesus' flock, he tended Jesus' sheep. He followed Jesus, even to his own death, most probably we learn also a crucifixion at Roman hands.

My friends, God is in the plan changing business, even today. God calls us, God guides us, and most of all God longs for a real relationship with us. And that's really the story of the 24 Hours that changed the world. That's the story of Easter.

God changed Peter's plans to live a quite life as a fisherman. And Mary Magdelene's plans to prepare Jesus' body for burial. And Simon the Cyrene's plans when he came to Jerusalem on a simple Passover pilgrimage, and ended up carrying Jesus' cross. God changed Albert Schweitzer's plans, and John Newton's plans and God can change your

plans. But you have to be open, you have to make your dreams, your life, your Best Laid Plans subject to change, change by an Act of God.