

Love, it seems, offers no security

By Reverend Katie Hambrick

Who here has watched Star Trek? I have always been a star wars girl until the Star Trek reboot movies came out. I will confess I only watched them because the lovely Chris Pine starred as Captain Kirk in the films. Since I first saw Chris Pine in the Princess Diaries 2 at the ripe age of 10, I knew we were to be married. Apologies to Graham for this story.

So of course, I had to support my future husband's new film. The story was good, but what really got me was how extremely captivating the characters were. The characters were all so diverse and had these deep back stories. It was truly unlike anything I had seen before.

The story follows the adventures of the U.S. Enterprise on their missions around space, and their attempts to fight for peace. However, the most thrilling part of their adventures is to see how Captain Kirk and Spock will work together. Captain Kirk and Spock are the number 1 and 2 in charge of the U.S. Enterprise. Captain Kirk is top dog, and he barely thinks things through. He just reacts to situations with action. While Spock on the other hand thinks everything through. Spock is all about the logical conclusion or answers to a situation.

The two have radically different methods and beliefs on how things should be done, yet when they work together, they end up saving the galaxy. They learn from each other and grow. They both realize that they need each other. They need both wisdom and passion.

When reading today's scripture, I could not help but notice that Peter is an awful lot like captain kirk, as John is a lot like spock. Here we have them fishing with no luck. Jesus tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. When they do this, John recognizes and understands that this is Jesus talking to them. As soon as John says that Jesus is on the shore, Peter jumps out of the boat to swim to the shore to see Jesus. What a total Captain Kirk move.

Peter and John are demonstrating the importance to understand and to put that understanding into action. We first must recognize God's work in our lives before we are able to act according to God's will. This story theme of the disciples attempting to catch fish with no luck then Jesus appearing to them, giving them instructions that lead to them catching a ton of fish. We see a similar story appear in Luke chapter 5.

In Luke, the story happens very early in Jesus' ministry. In that story, Peter, James, and John leave everything behind to follow Jesus. They become disciples. However, in John, this story

happens post resurrection. John is doing this to remind the reader that God constantly meets us where we are at. That God's grace is not in the past with death, but in the ever-present of life- in life's joys, sorrows, and wonders.

The disciples are still trying to process everything that has just occurred, and Peter tells the group he is going fishing. He is going back to his trade and comfort. Remember, Peter is a man of action.

He probably wanted to do something tangible that he loved and did not use a lot of brain power to help him process his emotions. The other disciples decide to join him. Imagine the emotions that would come from seeing your friend (the Messiah) arrested, tried, executed, and then resurrected. It has to be a weird feeling. How could someone process all of that?

But in both Luke and John, Jesus talks directly to Peter about following Jesus' path of love and liberation. In Luke, he recruits Peter to be a disciple. In John, Jesus is asking him to disciple and care for his fellow Christ followers. This dialogue they are having on the shore in John is also interesting because of the two interchanging words used for love.

See, Jesus is instructing Peter to love his people. Jesus is using the Greek term agape, which means Godly love. It is love for another person that comes from recognizing that another

person is created in the image of God therefore worthy of love and dignity. However, when Peter responds to Jesus, he uses the term Phila (fi-la). Phila (fi-la) is not Eros or romantic love. It is not a Godly or possessive love. It is a term used for deep friendship love. This would be the type of love between two best friends, maybe even siblings.

This is important, because Jesus is showing Peter that to love God is to love others- to love God's children. This is not the only place where the gospel of John uses those two words for love interchangeably. Some scholars believe that this is a stylistic choice with no real value. However, it seems to be significant in this story because Jesus is using it to teach Peter about what it means to be a Christ follower. He is telling Peter if you truly love me the way you claim, then you will love my people. You show me love by loving my people- loving them as if they are a very dear friend. Loving them because they were created in God's image and they are worthy of love. That is my assessment as to why Jesus is using the term for godly love, while Peter is using the term for friendship love in this story.

Another interesting echo is that Jesus asks Peter three times if Peter loves him. This reminds us of the 3 times that Peter denied Jesus. Reminding us that God calls the broken. That God's grace is stronger than any doubt, denial, or action that a

human could perform. God still calls, feeds, and empowers deniers and doubters.

However, Jesus ends what could be a beautiful moment about showing God's love to others by expressing to Peter that his belt would be fastened by another person. For those who are confused by this like I was, Jesus is telling Peter that his death will be violent and will happen at the hand of enemies. Isn't that a lovely thing to point out to a friend?

The text does not tell us who will cause this violent end to Peter. What the text is telling us is that love does not equal security. Grace does not equal security. Not even God's love or grace. It implies that Peter will be killed because of his love for God. That in order for Peter to truly lead the church and to love God's people, he has to be willing and ready to risk everything-including his life.

That is agape love. Being willing to risk your own life to love another human, even one you do not know. Most of us will not have that extreme of a situation, but we can be let down by humans we love. We can pour and pour into a person love and grace, only to have them gossip or lie to us. That can kill a bit of your soul as well.

One of my favorite books is called *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green. This book is about two teens with life threatening

illnesses that fall in love. Green was inspired to write this book after serving as a hospital chaplain for years. It is a loosely based story on a couple of his patients. There is a quote in the book that rather sticks out in my brain. One of the main characters Gus says, “you don’t get to choose whether you get hurt in this world, but you do have some say in who hurts you.”

Now he is referencing loving the other main character Hazel, knowing that they both are sick and one of them will die before the other. He goes on to explain how their love was worth getting hurt over. That the joy they felt being together is worth the pain that will follow. That they gave each other forever in the numbered days they had together.

Though this is a quote from a character in a novel, it is an enlightening statement, because we will all suffer in this life. We will all have friends who betray us. We will betray our friends. Someone we love will pass on, and we will feel left behind.

However, does that mean that we should opt out of love? Should Peter not follow Jesus’ call to love his people and help lead the church, because he finds out that he will suffer a violent death? No. We can’t choose whether we get hurt or not. We can’t always choose the obstacles life throws into our path. We can choose how we live our lives.

We can choose whether we will follow Jesus' path of love and liberation.

We can choose to love others more than ourselves.

We can choose to live a life of integrity.

Jesus is posing this very idea to Peter. Jesus goes one step further and says if you love me then you will love my people even if it causes you pain. This does not mean that he is asking Peter to live recklessly and throw his pearls to swine. But it does mean that Peter has a choice. He can answer the call to love others more than himself, or he can run from it. There is suffering no matter what path we choose in this life. There is no way around that, but the good news is that we do have a little say in how we choose to live our life, which gives us a very small say in who or how we get hurt.

At the very end of today's passage, after Jesus tells Peter that he will die violently, he says to him, "follow me." Follow my path of love. Follow this path of liberation. Follow me and live your life with integrity.

Just like Peter, we are being asked to follow the path Jesus has laid out before us. We are being asked to love our neighbors and to be willing to risk everything for that love. Follow me. Amen.