

It is really an honor and a delight to be with all of you and your Rector Duncan and your Associate Priest Mark Waldo here at St. John's in Montgomery. It's great to be here with all of you. We had a wonderful morning at the 7:30 AM service, and you all strike me as the, as people who are not 7:30 AM people. But it's good to, to be here. St. John's Montgomery is one of 86 wonderful parishes in the Diocese of Alabama. If you drew a horizontal line through Montgomery, the diocese stretches from that horizontal line all the way to the northern border of our state. We've got parishes of all different shapes and sizes and personalities and, and you are just one of the wonderful downtown parishes that we've got. We also have two, uh, diocesan camps, not just one, but we've got two. I bet a number of you have been to Camp McDowell in Nauvoo, a great place that has programs throughout the year, including summer camp, where they've just completed a great summer of summer camp where almost 1,100 children experienced the gospel in Christian community with their peers, a dynamic place. We've also got a second camp in Greensboro at the public elementary school there called Sawyerville, where this summer 582 children from the Black Belt experienced the gospel in Christian community there at their public elementary school. So you're a part of something much, much larger, and we as Episcopalians are also a part of the Anglican Communion of Churches, which is the third largest body of Christians in the world. And speaking of the Anglican Communion, I want to tell you a story about the Archbishop of Canterbury way back, um, one several ago. And this story is a funny one, which is my cue to laugh here in just a minute, okay? There was an Archbishop of Canterbury in the last century who was not exactly beloved. He was not loved by, uh, the bishops, he was not loved by the clergy, and people didn't enjoy his sermons. And he had his, his portrait unveiled. You, when you're in your parish hall, can look up and see these portraits of bishops and, uh, I only saw the bishops. There might be a portrait of a former rector, but you probably know because you go to St. John's what these things kinda look like. A portrait can, can sometimes

work well, sometimes not, and often get dated rather quickly. It's a snapshot in time. Well, this, this archbishop's portrait was being unveiled, and he was standing next to the Bishop of Durham, who was certainly not a fan of him. Your rector, Duncan, used to work for the Bishop of Durham. And they unveiled the portrait, and the Archbishop of Canterbury turned to the Bishop of Durham and said, "They say that I look pompous, prelatical, and proud." And the Bishop of Durham said, "To which of these epithets, Your Grace, do you take exception?" In other words, the portrait was accurate. In Matthew's gospel, we have several wonderful and, and complex portraits of Saint Peter. In the gospel reading for this morning, it, it's one of the better portraits. It's the portrait of the time in which Peter got it right when he opens his mouth and confesses Jesus to be the Messiah. Now let me glance quickly at one of the other portraits in which Peter opened his mouth and did not get it right. Earlier this month, for the Feast of the Transfiguration, we read another gospel reading from Matthew when Jesus takes only three apostles up on top of Mount Tabor, and you have this, the transfiguration of Jesus, and He is seen in this incredible white light, this incredible vision that would bring all of us at St. John's in Montgomery to our knees. But not Peter. Right after that vision or even during that vision, Peter rises to his feet and begins talking, and says, "Lord, it's good for us to be here. Let me make three dwellings, and then we'll invite people from down the mount..." And he just keeps talking and talking and talking and talking until finally Jesus gets him to be quiet. It's hard for Peter to be quiet. Some of us might relate. I'm a preacher, I do. But back to this gospel reading this morning. Jesus is inviting the gosp- the, the apostles to talk about who people say that He is. And, and they're offering. Some say you're Elijah, some say you're this other prophet, some say John the Baptist, so on and so forth. And Jesus asks a very pointed and very personal question, "But who do you say that I am?" It's a question that we should imagine is being addressed to each of us. "Who do you say that I am?" Peter speaks up, and this time he gets it right. He becomes the

first person in human history to declare that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, the one we've waited for centuries. You're finally here. Jesus then affirms what Peter says, and then he renames Peter and gives him a blessing and a new name. He calls him the rock upon whom he will build the church. You know, I believe that St. Matthew has a sense of humor. And so a couple of Sundays ago in church, he tells us a story that in light of this morning's story becomes even funnier. This is another invitation to laugh in just a moment. And it's the story of Jesus walking on the water. You might remember it. He's walking on the water, and this is yet another vision of, of Jesus' identity as the Son of the living God, and that Jesus mysteriously has the ability to not only calm storms of all forms, but walk upon the waters of chaos. He's the one that we should look to when we feel like we're drowning. He's the one that we should look to when we need a helping hand. He's the one that we look to when the chaos is way too much for us. Peter watches all of this go down, and he steps out onto the water to walk toward Jesus, and here's the funny part. The rock sinks. Rocks don't float. And so Peter, with all of his dynamic personality and confidence and weight and courage. If all of that is taken too far, it just doesn't work, and so he sinks and is humbled. I don't know if you've heard the expression that someone has main character syndrome. Peter has main character syndrome long before that term was ever, ever invented. These portraits of Peter have me thinking about the wonderful and complex relationship between proclamation and personality, proclamation and personality. All of us, every single one of us in this service, will make a commitment in the baptismal covenant in just a moment to proclaim by word and example, by word and example, the good news of God in Christ. I realize that not every one of us in here is a preacher, but all of us, every single one of us, regardless of what you do for a living, whether you're retired, don't work, however you serve, volunteer, and live, in your own neighborhood, in your own house, with everyone you come into contact, you will make a promise this morning to

proclaim the gospel in word and in deed. And your personality is a wonderful gift, a wonderful part of how you do that until it's not. For all of us, like Peter, our personalities can, if taken to the extreme, can sometimes get in the way. If you talk so much that you take the air out of the room, that's not proclaiming the exam- the good news of God in Christ in word. If you always think you know the answer, that takes the air out of the room and doesn't give other people the chance to speak, and so on and so forth. Each of our personalities is a God-given gift. There's never been another person like us. There'll never be another person like us. But do we have the humility to realize that we sometimes make mistakes just like Peter, and we need to turn again and be forgiven and start over and give room for other people to speak, for other people to use their personalities, for other people to proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ? Perhaps the most beautiful portrait of Peter occurs at the end of the gospel for whom St. John's is named, the Gospel of St. John the Evangelist. And it's there, once Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, that he appears to Peter after Peter has denied Jesus three times on the eve of the crucifixion. And it's there in that resurrection scene that Jesus restores, forgives, and maybe even heals Peter three times for what he has done. And Peter promises, in a way not dissimilar to the promises we're about to make, that he will continue to feed God's sheep, that he will continue to proclaim in word and example the good news of God in Christ. And Jesus there in that portrait alludes to the fact that Peter ultimately will do that, and with his dying breath will become a martyr of the church and offer all that he has and all that he is for the sake of the gospel. The invitation in all of these portraits for us is not to try to look literally like Peter, but to do something similar, to promise that we'll do our best. And I like to imagine that every now and then Peter is looking down from heaven at each of us, and when we make a mistake, just as he surely did, winking at us as if to say, "Keep going. You can try again tomorrow. I made my mistakes, too." Amen