

**Sermon**  
**2 September 2018**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: Luke 22:54-62

Holy Communion

---



Have a good look at the picture... If you were standing on the shore, you would think that a shark is approaching, because the shark fin is the only visible part of that fish. But underneath the surface, hidden from human eyes, is the real thing – a beautiful, harmless goldfish.

Has that ever been you??

Have you ever pretended to be someone you are not?

Have you ever shown the world that you are a dangerous, mighty shark; when in actual fact you are nothing more than a vulnerable, helpless goldfish?

Have you ever said anything, and then minutes after the words crossed your lips, you wondered: “Now where did THAT come from? I can’t believe I just said that!!”

I think we all do that. We pretend, we hold up a front, we act out of character... Sometimes we do this *intentionally*, like it’s some kind of survival strategy; but sometimes it happens *completely unintentionally*, even to a degree where we are shocked by our own words or actions...

\*\*

This behaviour is nothing new, it’s as old as time really... This picture could just as well have been a photo of Peter. A goldfish through and through, but showing the world nothing but his shark fin.

A shark is a dangerous animal. A shark will *eat* a goldfish without thinking about it twice. Certain types of sharks will eat a *human* without thinking about it twice, for that matter!!

And this made me think of funny story. One year, when we were on holiday in South Africa, we went to the beach with André’s mum. It was a scorching hot summer’s day, on a beach in the South Coast of South Africa, where it gets so hot you can’t walk barefoot on the sand without getting burnt badly.

So when we arrived at the beach, it was heaving with people, but nobody was swimming in the sea. I found this quite odd, but not my dear husband and mum-in-law. Oh no! They couldn’t get into the water to cool down quick enough.

It never even crossed their minds that all those people, sitting and sweating on the beach, were maybe, just maybe not in the water for a reason?!

So there André and his mum were swimming away, completely oblivious to the life guards who blew on their whistles and swung their arms frantically in the air – until a lifeguard had to swim in behind them and tell them to come out immediately because there was a shark spotted in the water earlier!

THEN the 2 of them came rushing out of the water, and only THEN they realised that it was quite odd that nobody else was swimming... But not even the bravest of swimmers will go in the water if there is a shark, because if that shark realises that you are in the water – chances are very good that you won't come out in one piece.

\*\*

I completely get how we sometimes want to pretend that we are sharks – so that other people should be careful around us, so that others don't mess with us, so that we can show the world that we are in control!!

But that sometimes make us say and do things that we most certainly will regret later.

Have a wee look at Peter, for instance. He was Jesus' number 1 follower. He said loud and clear that he would never leave Jesus' side – no matter what the cost.

And then, when this statement was put to the test – what does he do?  
He shows his shark fin, *and* his teeth!

Because when confronted – he denies 3 times that he knows Jesus.  
Now why on earth would he do that?

Personally, I think it was one of those moments where the words came out of his mouth without him planning it that way.

Of course he was scared. What was going to happen to Jesus now?  
What would happen to him if the people realised he was with Jesus?

At least he was *there*, by Jesus' side! Where were the other disciples?  
Hiding?!

It was almost like when a child broke a window with a golf ball and, standing there, with the golf club still in his hands and guilt written all over his face, he says: "It wasn't me!"

I'm sure Peter didn't mean it! He just honestly didn't know what to do...

So he denied that he knew Jesus 3 times over, underlying the fact that he meant what he said. He didn't only say it once, quietly, and then corrected his mistake. No, he confirmed it twice.

Saying something 3 times in those days, where most people couldn't read or write, was like signing a contract; sealing the deal...

What strikes me most in this passage, and we only find it described like this here in Luke, is that when the cock crowed, Jesus turned around and *looked* at Peter. He looked straight at him.

He didn't have to say "I told you so" – because, feeling guilty, Peter read it in his eyes. Peter realised that Jesus knew all along that he wasn't as strong as he pretended to be.

Jesus *knew* he was a goldfish and not a shark.

But you know, I don't think Jesus looked at Peter with an "I-told-you-so" look. A single look can speak a thousand words, we all know that. But I'm sure that Jesus looked at Peter with empathy, with an "Oh Peter, I-love-you-anyway" look. Almost with pity in his eyes, because he knew Peter's heart was now breaking into a thousand pieces.

Jesus saw the goldfish, and loved the goldfish.

Poor Peter... I'm sure he wished a million times he could unsay those words, he could do it all over again, but life doesn't work like that. Once you've said something, you can never take it back.

And the worst of it all is, I don't even know that we can say for certain that that servant girl wanted to expose Peter! Peter obviously assumed that that was what she wanted to do, but what if she just wanted to ask him what all the commotion was about? Because if he knew Jesus, he could maybe explain to them all what was going on...

But you know what? I think it's a good thing that Jesus knew who Peter really was; that God knows who we really are.

Peter might have been able to fool the rest of the world, but not Jesus. Jesus looked under the surface, and he knew that Peter was a goldfish at heart.

And he does exactly the same with all of us too. We can pretend all we want, we can try our best to give the people around us a certain impression of who we want them to think we are. But God looks under the surface, He knows who we really are.

And he loves us just like that.

Edmond Mbiaka said:

“Perfection is a goal that will forever remain impossible for any human being to achieve. Therefore, the only achievable goal is to only strive to become the best that you can possibly be.”

Let's be the best we can be, because we know God loves us.

God loves the “you” that you are hiding away underneath the surface of the water. He knows the true *you*, and he loves you even though you sometimes feel you have to show your tough side to the world!

Let's just be honest. Honest with ourselves, honest with the world. Let's not try to be that person we think the rest of the world wants us to be.

When we feel strong, let's act strong; but when we feel weak, let's not be afraid to let it show. Because if you need a cuddle and all you show to

the people around you is a shark's fin – believe me, nobody is going to come anywhere near you!

Peter denied Jesus. He disappointed Jesus. But Jesus' love for him didn't diminish because of this, He still made Peter the leader of the church. And Jesus confirmed this 3 times over.

Nobody is perfect. God didn't expect Peter to be perfect, and He doesn't expect any of *us* to be perfect either. He loves us despite our shortcomings and our faults.

And He invites all of us to come sit around his table now, to *remember* just how very much He loves us. We don't deserve this privilege, we can't do anything to make ourselves worthy of the love of God, but He gives it to us *anyway*. He can see deep into our hearts, where nobody else can see.

Let's embrace this, and don't shy away from it. And let's thank God for giving us the courage to get through every day – especially when we feel like tiny goldfish in an ocean full of sharks.

Amen