

## Peter's Wife's Story

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### Note 1: Capernaum

*The apostle Peter began as a fisherman in Capernaum on the shore of Lake Galilee. He would have been a young man when he met Jesus, and we know he was married as Jesus healed his mother-in-law. His name was originally Simon (actually Simeon in Hebrew), but Jesus renamed him 'Rock' which in Aramaic was 'Cephas' and in Greek, Peter. His brother Andrew also became a disciple. Their house became 'home base' for Jesus during their 3 years together; they went out on preaching tours and returned there. When Jesus responded to an argument among the disciples about who was the greatest he took a little child on his knee, presumably Peter's own child (Matthew 18:1-5). Peter's wife is never mentioned directly in scripture. This is my attempt at her story. Apologies for the 'letter' format, as a girl in rural 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel would probably not have been literate.*

Dear Simeon, (AD 26. Age 16)  
Great news! Uncle has said YES. You can marry me! I am so excited. You have been my friend for as long as I can remember and now you are going to be my husband. Thank you, thank you, you wonderful man.

Mum says thank you for the fish. They were delicious.

And thank you for inviting her to come live with us. As you said, we can't leave her all by herself. Since Dad died she's been getting sick more often. You are so kind, big hearted. Mum says you're a good man but that you leap before you look and that will get you in trouble one day! I love you and I'm going to keep on loving you every day of our lives. I don't care that our lives won't ever be important and we won't get to see much the world. We are Galilean fisherfolk and that is fine with me.

From your Betrothed,  
Sarah

Dear Simeon, (AD 32. Age 22)  
Hello my dear. Hello to Mary and Martha and Lazarus. I thought if I sent a letter to their place it would get to you. I heard you have been to all sorts of places this trip. I hear all sorts of rumours about Jesus and most are so crazy that they must be true! We miss you. The girls talk about you all the time – Daddy this and Daddy that. Except when they are remembering Jesus. Elizabeth makes me tell her every night at bedtime about how when you were here last Jesus picked her up and put her on his knee with all the disciples sitting around him and said "To enter the Kingdom of heaven you must become like this little child." And she says "Jesus loves me" and goes to sleep with a smile on her face. O but we do miss you all.

Your father grumps at me and says you should be back here doing a man's work on the boat. But he's OK about it because I know that Jesus sits down with him each time he's home and they talk together into the night and he trusts that you and Andrew are in good hands, even if the two of you are not where your dad wants you to be.

Or me.

Even when I have two lovely girls curled up beside me my bed still feels empty without you. If it was anyone else but Jesus you were following I would be so cross with you, but

him – he looks at me with those eyes of his and he tells me how important you are to him and how the Kingdom of Heaven is so near ... I can still feel the fire inside of me. Last time you were home he seemed sad though. Did you feel it? And he held my hand so tight it hurt and he said something so dreadful that I couldn't even talk to you about it ... about how he would have to suffer and die but that he would be raised to life. And I didn't understand, didn't want to hear it, so I rushed off to make tea. But I'll never forget the look on his face of such sadness and also such tender affection. I know why you stay with him. He needs you. Even more than I do.

Take care my love.  
Sarah

Note 2: Jerusalem

*After the dramatic events of the first Easter and Pentecost, the beginnings of the early church was based in Jerusalem. Jesus told them to stay there, and from there spread the good news of salvation through the rest of Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. The two key leaders of this church were Peter and Jesus' brother James. Surely their families moved to live with them in Jerusalem. Although Jesus called them to "leave wives and children" to follow him, Jesus also strongly affirmed marriage and parenting and family life. The early church was based in local homes, so required the active involvement of both husbands and wives in church leadership and ministry. Worship happened both in Temple and Synagogue and at table fellowship around open family meals, music, prayer and discussions.*

Dear Peter (AD 33. Age 23)  
(everyone else is calling you & I am trying to get used to it)

You want us to do WHAT??!! Leave our home and move to Jerusalem?? You have got to be KIDDING!! What about our home? Your father? The boat? Our friends, the baby, the girls, my mother ... Jerusalem?? I mean, it's all very fine for festival, but to live there ... how could I leave the lake, the birds, the peace of my home? I'm not a city girl! And what would you do in Jerusalem? You're a fisherman, Simeon. You had those amazing years with Jesus, but he's gone now. Can't life go back to normal?

Oh who am I kidding? There is no such thing as normal any more, is there. Nothing will ever be the same again. We have known Him. Jesus. And he died and he did rise again, just like he promised us he would. And I was there, I saw him. And I was there standing beside you that incredible morning when fire fell on us all. And I couldn't help myself and I cried out with praise and utter joy and discovered that I was talking in some strange language and when we all ran outside those black-skinned people got so excited because I was talking to them in their language! But the most amazing thing for me was after we calmed down and everyone wondered what to do next and then you stood up and started speaking. And all those people listened to you. Oh Simeon, there were THOUSANDS of them! But I was listening most of all because here was my hot-head fisherman husband from nowhere speaking so passionately and clearly and people were really listening. I have never loved you as much as I did at that moment. I am so proud of you. And I know that Jesus is so proud of you and he still needs you.

You know something else? I can still feel him holding my hand. I can still see him looking at me and loving me, and our children. We have to tell all those people about him and show them how to live in the nearness of the Kingdom of Heaven.

I figure you probably need me so that you don't do anything too stupid so yes, alright, I'm coming. Please send Andrew to help us pack and give his nieces shoulder rides. See you soon, your loving wife always,  
Sarah

Note 3: Council

*Paul, Barnabas and others, presumably including Luke, traveled down from Asia to Jerusalem in AD49 for the first Council, recorded in Acts 15. This meeting, lead by both Peter and James, decided that circumcision would not be required of Gentile converts. The evangelist Philip we hear about in Acts 8 settled in Caesarea, a coastal port town north of Jerusalem, where he had four daughters who became prophets. It is not impossible that their mother might just have been Peter's daughter. Assuming that Luke accompanied Paul on this journey it would have been his first trip to Israel, and presumably the time when he began to record oral history as the basis for his Gospel.*

Dear Peter, (AD 49, age 39, from Caesarea)  
What an interesting week it has been! Paul and Barnabas have been staying with us here in Caesarea, on their way down to you – and I'm giving them this letter for you. Though I'll be coming home soon, if I can bear to tear myself away from these baby girls! Oh honey, to see our daughter holding twins, my heart explodes with joy every day. Praise the Father Almighty and the Lord Jesus for the blessings of new life and love! And we see new life in the church every day also. Elizabeth and Philip make such a great team! Philip, well you know Philip, he is so fearless. He's out and about every day (though not quite so much lately with so much happening at home!) greeting the ships as they come into port, hearing news from all over the world, telling every person he meets about the great news of the incredible new life and fellowship offered to them through Jesus Christ. And the people he brings to dinner, you would not believe! An Egyptian slave last week, an elderly priest from Damascus, a Roman soldier who has travelled all the way to Britain!

Philip is the evangelist, but our Elizabeth is the real leader around here, organising the meals, carefully linking new people into the right house group, calling team meetings, planning worship.

But this week, I can hardly express the excitement that shook all the church as Paul and Barnabas spoke! Our meetings have taken twice as long and no one wants to go home, as story after story pour out about the incredible movement of God far and wide. Churches are growing and miracles happening, people from all cultures and walks of life, and the Holy Spirit falling on them quite regardless of who has or has not been circumcised and purified. It's only later, after the others have left, that they talk about the struggles and disappointments and conflicts.

I know there are many godly men trying to convince you that all believers must follow Moses' law. Because the promises of God are for Israel, the Lord's chosen people, right!? Oh Peter, remember that vision God gave you, back when you first met Paul, of all the animals and the voice from heaven saying "Eat, for what God has made clean do not call filthy". It is not how we wash our hands or how what we do with boys' foreskins that makes us clean, it is God at work in our hearts. Every day here in Caesarea we see God at work and the Spirit doesn't first check what kind of penis a person has, or even if they have one! The women are just as blessed and called by Christ as the men!

And yet even as I write this I shudder as I know the implications of what I write. If we flout the Torah how can we share in the life of Synagogue and Temple? Our Jewish family and friends will be so hurt. So much is changing in our crazy world, how can we cast ourselves away the arms of our Mother who bore us, our Father who sustained us from the very beginning?

We must have a meeting. Invite everyone, all the leaders from all our churches. Everyone needs to hear what Barnabas and Paul have to say, and we must come to a common mind on this. Give us a week, and Philip and I will be there. There are plenty of willing hands here to help with gorgeous baby girls.

Oh, one other thing. One of Barnabas' team is a young man called Luke. He is so charming, such a great listener! He's from Antioch in Syria, trained as a doctor actually, he's done some healings while he's been here. He is writing a journal of his travels. It's great reading! I told him about John Mark writing down all about Jesus so that what we remember can be shared with the churches all over the empire. And as I talked it was like a bonfire started burning in his eyes! He has heard much about Jesus already, of course, but he realized how much more he has not heard, and how marvelous it would be for all the events to be recorded. He wanted to get started right away, and I agreed on the condition that he didn't write anything about me! So he followed me around as I changed nappies and cooked lunch and I told him about how we first met Jesus, back on the lake shore, and how he healed my mother and then moved in with us, and more and more people joined him and ... and ...

Oh Peter, I talked and wept and talked and it was amazing how vivid those memories are still. Then Luke hid himself away all afternoon and wrote and wrote. So when he comes to you please give him some of your time. And tell him the personal stuff too, the parts that only you know about. Oh, and he must meet Mary, James & Jesus' mother. Would she be up to it, do you think? She's frail but I know she'd enjoy talking to Luke. He has a wonderful way of drawing the stories out of you.

I must go. The babies are waking. I'll take one of them out for a walk by the sea, that will be good for both of us. I love the sea birds wheeling and calling, and the boats and the peace of the waves. And I'll remember those walks beside the lake with Jesus all those years ago, and know that he is still here with me every day. I love you. See you soon. Take care,  
Sarah.

#### Historical Note 4: Antioch

*The Jerusalem Council was a huge moment for the early church. The stories and the arguments they had! Luke records only a summary of the summarizing speeches from Peter and James, in which the collective leadership cautiously endorsed Paul's proposal that the church begin to cut itself loose from Jewish law. Peter is not mentioned again in Acts, and only James is referred to in relation to the Jerusalem church (Acts 21:18). Instead, Paul tells of Peter arriving in Antioch in Syria (modern day Turkey) soon afterwards in Galatians 2:11-14. The two men had a public argument, and most of the letter to the Galatians is Paul's side of this argument. It was a continuation of the Jerusalem Council debate about Jew and Gentile, issues around law and freedom, what to eat and who to eat with, how to be both inclusive and faithful. Peter seems to get caught in the middle, between Paul and his Gentile friends on one side, and James and his Jewish friends on the other.*

*So, what happened to Peter at the Jerusalem Council that made him leave? Did his wife go too? We know that she did because Paul says that she "accompanied" Peter, as did other apostle's wives, in 1 Corinthians 9:5. Church tradition is that Peter became the first Bishop of Antioch, and remained there for 7 years before going to Rome.*

*There is an odd thing; the Jerusalem church saw Peter as the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7&14) yet Paul seems himself as the apostle to the Gentiles, and he describes Peter as the "apostle for the circumcised" in Galatian 2:7 & 8. Clearly the relationship between these two men was not always amicable. They fundamentally agreed theologically, but the differences between them went deep. Paul was a Roman citizen, a highly educated member of the Jewish elite. Peter was a Galilean fisherman. Paul spoke and wrote fluent Greek and Hebrew. Peter spoke Aramaic and had to learn Greek the hard way; he probably always spoke it with a thick Galilean accent! Peter had been Jesus' best friend. Paul only met Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Peter was probably quiet by nature, and liked to keep the peace, though when he decided to do something he threw himself into it boots and all! Paul was argumentative, outgoing, bossy. Both were passionate and brilliant, in their own ways. Much of the New Testament is a one-sided record of the on-going debates between the key leaders in the early church, especially between Peter and Paul – debates that live on in the church to this day.*

Dear Elizabeth

(AD 50, age 40, from Antioch)

Oh my darling I miss you so much already! and those girls, and I hear there's another one on the way, congratulations. My head is still spinning, what a year it has been. I don't know how to begin to tell you about Antioch and the dramas we have had getting here and in the church after we got here.

I know you didn't want me to leave Judea, but the decision was made back a year ago in the big Council meeting. Your father had sat quietly for hours listening to the arguments going back and forward (as Paul was getting redder and redder with frustration). Then he got to his feet and before he said anything he looked at me just for a second and in his eyes there was such an intensity of conviction and I knew that Christ had spoken to him directly and reminded him of his true calling and in that moment I knew that things were changing for us. He was magnificent, your father: "It was through me that the Gentiles began to hear the gospel" he said. What a speech, finishing with "We will be saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as the Gentiles will". There was stunned silence, after which people listened much more attentively to Paul and Barnabas. Anyway, you know the outcome. Paul & Barnabas are free to continue to plant Gentile churches. And your father and I have joined them.

Funny, really. I thought I would have been distraught to leave Jerusalem, and our families and the friends we have lived so closely with these past 15 years. And I was, of course, it was hard to leave. It was good to go back home to Capernaum, check on the family there. The fishing business is in good hands, our home is full of children and laughter and the smell of fish, just how I remember it. But it is not my home any more. Funny, I kept half expecting Jesus to walk through to door, half seeing him walking the lake shore. I still remember every word he said, how my world exploded ... but then, it was time to go and I was not sad. My heart was light, expectant, eager to see more of the world, eager to meet Jesus in new places, to share him with new people. Oh Elizabeth, the world is so big! And Peter and I set off and left our homeland behind. A new country, new ways of talking, new things to eat, people to meet.

I wish I could tell you that Paul welcomed us with open arms when we got here. The fact is, Paul was really not all that nice to us. I think he is threatened by Peter, if you ask me. But to stand up and argue with Peter in front of everyone, to accuse him of only caring about Jewish law and rejecting the grace of Christ – that cut deep after all we did sticking up for him in Jerusalem!

Oh Elizabeth, we care so much for the church. We don't just talk about loving one another, we really do ... I just wish it was easier. When conflict comes it cuts to the heart, and especially so far away from home, I felt very lonely for a while. But the local women and I have been getting to know each other. They are very patient trying to understand me, and teaching me the local tongue. And they just are so eager to learn, hungry for more about Jesus, amazed at the things I tell them, my heart just grows bigger. There have been some wonderful healings when Peter has prayed for people, and they listen closely to his preaching. Me, my work is quieter. I love to tell stories and pray with people, and God never ceases to bless them, and bring in more people week by week.

Paul is starting to talk about leaving, and he's keen to travel with Barnabas again – they make a great team. But Barnabas wants to take Mark and Paul is dead against Mark – he hasn't forgiven him from ditching them last year – so the tension around here is rising. If only we were all as kind and loving and patient as Jesus calls us to be! But this is the real world, and we are all just real people, and we quarrel and hurt and meet and separate, and try to keep up unity in the Spirit for the good of the church.

Anyway, my darling, the church here has asked us to stay on, so it would seem that this is to be our new home here. Maybe next year you and Philip and the girls could come up to visit us. How I would love to see you again.

Love, always, your Mum.

#### Note 5: Corinth

*Paul's first letter to the Corinthians calls the church to unity. He had heard that there were various theological cliques; a Paul club (Paul had planted the church in the first place), the Apollos club, and the Peter club (1 Corinthians 1:12). Both Apollos and Peter had clearly spent time visiting the church in Corinth, preaching and baptizing, and calling people into leadership. Presumably Peter, with his wife, travelled to Corinth (and who knows where else!) on a missionary journey independent of Paul & Barnabas, during their time based in Antioch. It is a staggeringly long way, crossing many different nations and cultures, by land and sea. I can't begin to grasp how a couple from Galilee did it! How did it shape them as people, their relationship, their experience of God, their ministries?*

*One of the central conundrums of the Christian faith is how the early church came to worship Jesus of Nazareth together with the Lord of heaven, sharing the same Name that is above all names, one God as Father and Son. Many scholars in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century believed that this was a late development, a grand scheme of Paul's, and not shared by the Jewish Christians (including Peter). Some even claimed that this 'high Christology' was a violation of what Jesus of Nazareth taught and claimed to be. A key question in this, then, is who Jesus' own friends understood him to be, and how they continued to experience Jesus as present through his Spirit in the life of the church. Peter's wife could answer these questions for us!*

Dear Daphne,

(AD 55. Age 45)

I just want to say a very big THANK YOU for hosting Peter and myself during our wonderful month with you in Corinth. My head is still buzzing with all the conversations

we had, and especially the amazing way that God's Spirit touched us and so many in your church during our visit. I will never forget the extraordinary power as people prayed and sang in tongues and praised with such extravagant gratitude to the Lord.

Thank you also for your interest in my stories about our Lord Jesus. I just love to talk about him, and all he said and did and how he tipped our lives upside down! When I see a prayer answered, or suspicions overcome by friendship, or joy bursting out, I just see Jesus. I'm sorry you didn't get to meet him in the flesh, but you do meet him every day, because you know him in your own heart. Feel his eyes of love on you. Feel his hand lifting you up. Feel his risen glory exploding in praise.

I know you would have liked me to preach more 'up front' but I am much more comfortable talking around the kitchen table. But you have such a gift for it! You can teach just as well as any of the men, and you have a depth of faith and knowledge of the scriptures. I do encourage you to step into leadership as you can.

God bless you and keep you as you nurture your church fellowship in the ways of the Lord Jesus, and care for your own family also.

Praise and glory be to our God!

Your friend,

Sarah

#### Note 6: Rome

*Church tradition is that Peter moved to Rome, becoming the first Bishop of Rome, and establishing the church there at the heart of Empire & Christendom. Although the Catholic church conveniently ignored Peter's wife in building the tradition of the celibate priesthood, I see no reason not to assume that she accompanied him to Rome, and could well have outlived him. Peter was, according to tradition, crucified upside-down at his own request, in about 64AD. Apparently he did not feel worthy of being crucified in the same way as Jesus and asked to be killed upside-down. Peter wrote letters from Rome to churches throughout the world (dictated to Silvanus, 1 Peter 5:12), which includes teaching on marriage and family life, as well as instructions for church leaders.*

*Ironically, Paul was also in Rome for those years (though under house arrest), and Paul and Peter were martyred within a year or so of each other. Had they resolved their conflict by then? Did they sit together in Paul's house arguing theology into the night? What role did Peter's wife play in the church? I wonder what she thought of Rome, this girl from the fishing village!*

Dear Elizabeth,

(AD 62, aged 52, from Rome)

Just a quick note to pop in with the courier who is delivering your copy of your father's letter to your church. Can you believe it! Your father, writing a letter to all the churches! I am bursting with pride. He has been working hard on his Greek script, but he asked Silvanus to write it out so it looked official. And then others made copies, every so carefully. I sat in the corner while he was dictating it, mending shirts & trying to look inconspicuous. When he got into the bit about marriage your father kept glancing at me and I couldn't help grinning at him. What a lovely thing to say, about love and beauty and all. You are the most beautiful woman I know, my dear, and your father is quite right – you don't need any fancy expensive trinkets, just let your beauty shine just as it is.

I don't want to worry you but things are getting worse here in Rome. There are regular flare-ups at Synagogue and army raids. Our people are doing marvelously well to stay courageous and joyful but there is a tangible feeling of menace in the air. I love having

the twins here with us, they are learning so much and are such a joy to have around. But I fear that if things get worse I will have to arrange for an escort for them to go home to you.

They came to breakfast last week all somber and shared with us a vision they had had. It was a picture of their grandfather with chains around his wrists, being pulled forward by soldiers. Peter and I just froze and clutched each others' hands. I never told you what Jesus said to your father, did I? Well, your prophetic girls have heard the Lord's words afresh. It was after his resurrection, that morning on the beach when the men were fishing and Jesus cooked fish and healed Peter's shame. Well, Jesus also said these words: "Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (John 21:18)

I do fear, my darling daughter. I do fear for him. Won't do any good, but I'm still just a woman.

No more time, the courier is waiting.

God bless,

Your Mum.

*... and afterwards ... after the grief, through the persecution, meeting in caves & graves, hiding in terror for their lives, through the ongoing conflicts and arguments, as children grew and the world changed ... how did an old woman continue to lead the church, quietly, gently, ever remembering a strange and wonderful visiting preacher who walked through her door one day and changed everything*



## Post script 1

"Where's the 'so what?' then, Silvia?" asked my husband when I raved on to him about all this. Why does it matter to me who these people were who lived so long ago?

Most of the New Testament describes events and conversations that happened over 40 years: the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and the explosive beginnings of the Christian Church throughout the Roman Empire despite conflict and persecution. I believe that these events and ideas form the turning point of human history. I believe that the promises and convictions in these writings are as true now as they were then. But what fascinates me is that these ideas and narratives are not abstract propositions; they are all mediated through people. What I love most about scripture is that it is written by people and about people; God is not an unattainable ideal, God is known in relationship. God's truth is lived out and transforms everyday life. The four Gospels were written to invite us into relationship with Jesus through his relationships with ordinary people. We the readers are drawn into each encounter recorded for us, as we allow their story to become our story. This is the living power of Holy Spirit inspiring scripture. The more we get to know the people who saw Jesus face-to-face, the more we who have not seen are blessed as we come also to believe (John 20:29, 1 Peter 1:8).

We are especially blessed that the Gospel writers chose to include women, but there are also many events and people not included (John 21:25). I have always been fascinated by Peter's wife. Mostly we assume that Peter lived a single life, like Paul ... in which case I wondered sadly if his wife had been left behind in Galilee while he went off and had adventures and lead the church. So it was a major revelation to me that Paul refers to Peter travelling with his wife in 1 Corinthians 9:5.

Those of us attempting the radical challenge of sustaining long-term marriage, together with ministries, children and extended family, in our rapidly changing society, desperately need role models. We need to know that marriage matters to God, and is a core part of Christ's plan for his church. And we need this not in abstract ideas or rules of conduct, but as a living pathway laid down for us; that it can be done and has been done!

The early Christian church reinvented marriage; Jesus, Peter and Paul set out principles for marriage that were radically different from the social norms of their day. The fact of that of these three men Peter was only one who actually was married makes his marriage, and his wife, highly significant. What we read in the pages of the New Testament is a calling to live in intimate relationships with each other; for those called into marriage the promise is for a fulfilling sexual closeness within a monogamous committed partnership. Marriage is affirmed, as the ultimate symbol for the relationship between Christ and his people. Love is not just an ideal for the church; it is a dynamic reality thrashed out through arguments and tender affection between lively personalities (Peter describes this as a genuine mutual love, deep, constant, gut-level; 1 Peter 1:22-23). It works because of one thing only: the living presence of Jesus Christ through his Spirit, that stand over all other claims.

Over the past 200 years storms of debate have raged about the origins of our Bible. Historians and scholars 'deconstructed' scripture, and called into question pretty much everything that the church took for granted about who had written what and when. An unfortunate consequence of this has been a de-personalising of scripture. So we talk

about "the writer of 1 Peter", because we cannot be sure that Peter actually wrote it. I want to argue for a re-connection with the people of the New Testament. Someone wrote 1 Peter, and to me it's convoluted and unhelpful to try to imagine some nameless scribe trying desperately to forge how he imagined Peter might have written! Why not just relate it as Peter himself (without being too dogmatic about it)? I get offended when the commentaries claim that Peter couldn't have written those letters because he was an illiterate fisherman (that seems as rude as calling Barack Obama a Hawaiian beach bum!). Peter (and his wife) were radically transformed by a life-long relationship with Jesus. To his dying day he was still an impulsive fisherman, but he became much more than that!

My last point is about precisely that: personality and sanctification. One of the reasons that a pastoral reading of scripture is so interesting and fruitful is that it reveals the dynamic interplay between who we were and who we become 'in Christ'. Peter begins his first letter by naming all Christians as having been "chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2). As well as being a profound and radical and orthodox and neat summary of the Trinity (!!) this describes the foundation of our identity. In our wonderful uniqueness we are loved, chosen and called. As we grow in relationship with Jesus through the work of the Spirit our lives are changed. And yet we also remain the same; in fact our experience is that through the sanctification of the Spirit we become even more 'who we are'. Sadly, it is possible to read books like 1 Peter and come away thinking that faith is about rules to be followed, and that we all have to come out looking, thinking and acting the same. The great thing about placing this in the context of Peter's own story is that we realise that "growing into salvation" (1 Peter 2:2) is not at all a diminishing of our identity and personality, but a true flowering of it.

Which gets me back to Peter's wife. Peter calls all women to "let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight." (1 Peter 3:4). This verse has been abused to quash the dynamic voice and confidence of women. But if we come to this afresh, reading it as a love letter to his own wife as well as to all women, how might it lead us? It is certainly just as relevant in our world of vast corporations dedicated to stripping us of cash as they sell us the lotions, potions and trappings of beauty. But does it mean that his own wife was naturally a "gentle and quiet" lady, always humbly obedient to her husband? Or might it mean that together they grew into a way of living, under obedience to Christ, that fostered a profound love and trust for each other. We women don't do 'gentle and quiet' very naturally, in my own experience! We women don't tend to trust in our inner beauty. I only see these things in women who have been forged in the fire of Christ's Spirit over time. These women are each quite different in character, but they share a stillness at the centre; a deep heart of confidence and gentleness, that enables them to make space for other people without anxiety, to pray and to bless, to work hard and rest well.

I am grateful to Peter's wife, whatever her name was. Quite a woman, I'd say!

Postscript 2)

## **Reflection for 'Personhood' course .... Why I relate to Peter's wife**

Much of my thinking about the significance of this story for me is discussed in the PostScript. I would like to add some more connections to link my own story with hers.

I first came to this as a young wife and mother, with a sense of grief ... I assumed from the silence about Peter's wife that she had been left behind by Peter. My grief was about my own sense of calling to ministry, and whether I would need to leave behind my identity as a woman, my role as wife and mother, in order to fully follow Christ & calling. I grieved for women silenced and ignored. I struggled with my own years of being home-bound by the weight of the constant attention that little children require. I grieved for my sense of peace and prayer, for my relationship with God what disappeared into the mess and clutter and noise of 3 boys! I so did not want Peter's wife to have been left behind in Galilee while Peter went off and saved the world!

So when I read something that pointed out the implications of 1 Corinthians 9:5 a bomb went off in my head, I was so excited. She traveled! She went too! Yay!! This meant so much, and connected strongly with my own journey

a) Ministry was a partnership, with marriage. Couples did this journey together, right from the very beginning of the church. Serving Christ in mission wasn't for single men off being footloose and fancy free, it was team business, for couples together, maybe even for families together. Chris and I trained for ministry together, sharing parenthood and community through several years. Although we have been called into different types of ministry, we are still a team and support each other's callings.

b) Their world expanded together. The experience of travel meant that they both learned and met new people, which surely would have kept the marriage alive and mutual and enriched. Nigel Dixon said recently that if we are moderately competent our external world grows. Peter & his wife experienced this in the most dramatic way imaginable, in their journey from Galilee to Rome at the height of the Roman empire, when thousands of diverse cultures and languages were being brought into contact with each other along Roman roads.

c) Their faith changed together. Nigel's challenge is to keep our inner world growing along with our outer world. It fascinates me that Peter (and his wife with him) continued to grow in faith; reading and re-reading scripture, continuing in relationship with Jesus, experience diverse worship and community life (including the power of the Holy Spirit).

What I love especially about Peter's wife is that she met Jesus. She was there at the very beginning, witnessing Jesus' first miracle right there in her own home. I love the intimacy of that, and I feel invited to share in her close friendship with Jesus, his love for her, and her children, and his at-home-ness with her family. I love the way that immediately expanded her world, bringing in a motley crew of disciples to share her home, not to mention half the town clamoring for healing! It was her roof that got caved in when the guys lowered the crippled man in. Not a bad metaphor for conversion – having the roof cave in! And Jesus, standing there, laughing at the falling masonry, not caring who he offends, proclaiming what no man had the right to proclaim, forgiveness, a fresh start!

I love the way the church grew, sometimes dramatic, often slow, sometimes painful. As I write her story I can relate to my own experience of church and ministry, of frustrations

and impatience as well as joy and blessing. Church is real people having real conflicts and experiencing real love in the real world.

I have painted a picture of her as a quiet behind-the-scenes woman, which is not the same as me. I have a 'big' personality and enjoy the up-front aspects of ministry.

However, I am also authentically an introvert and need increasing amounts of solitude and quiet as I get older.

I too am mother as well as Minister. My relationship with my children (and the various other children who come our way) is a central part of my life and who I am, as it is for Peter's wife.

I can relate to the expanding world of her journey also myself in terms of my growing wider responsibilities. I work in a local church here in Palmerston North but I also am increasingly being asked to hold leadership roles in the regional and national church. I am comfortable with this and recognize it as part of my calling to ministry, specifically to encourage others in their ministry and help with the ministry discernment process. This was clearly an increasing part of Peter's ministry (leading towards the whole 'Pope' thing ultimately), and I see his wife as sharing in this.