

Expecto Patronum

Epiphany 3, Year A

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Who here is Harry Potter fan? Who has read the books by JK Rowling or watched the movies?

One of my favorite moments in the Harry Potter stories is when Harry is being attacked by foul fiends called dementors, who suck out people's souls and leave them depressed and in despair. (Which sounds sort of like Facebook to me...) But Harry has learned a charm to ward them off. He pulls out his wand and yells...

Does anyone know the charm?

Expecto Patronum!

And he calls forth his Patronus, a protective force that chases away the dementors and keeps Harry safe. Harry's patronus takes the form of a stag, which sort of reminds him of his father, who could also change into this powerful shape. It takes a lot to actually get a patronus to manifest. Harry is good at charms, he's even better at believing in people and in himself.

Now our church has a patronus, or patron, as well. And if had a magic wand to wave in our hour of need, and if we shouted *Expecto Patronum*, we would see a flash of light and before us would appear ...

A Fisherman. a guy not too different from the rest of us, But a man who is fiercely loyal, has a deep belief in who Jesus is, and still manages to mess up the relationship time and time again,

It's almost like saying "*expecto patronum*" and getting ... Ron Weasley.

Not exactly a charging stag, but not a bad choice either in someone to have by your side.

Of course, I'm talking about our church's Patron Saint, Saint Peter. His special feast day was earlier this week on Jan. 18 – The Confession of St. Peter, where Peter realizes that Jesus is the Messiah and says it out loud for everyone to hear. In many of the stories about Peter in the bible, Peter is the first one that Jesus calls to follow him, and he's the first one who recognizes who Jesus really is, and he really, really, really believes in his friend, to the point of being a little scared of him. So maybe he's a little like Ron Weasley after all.

It sort of like, if Peter had yelled: *Expecto Messiah*. Jesus would have appeared.

But that's not how it happened we know. Today's Gospel story from Matthew tells us that Jesus was walking along the seashore and he saw Peter and his brother Andrew fishing, and he called them to follow him. "I will make you fish for people," Jesus said. And that was enough to make Peter and his brother drop their nets and follow Jesus. *Expecto Disciples*....

If you were here last week, we had a different version of the story. Andrew had spent an afternoon with Jesus and was so convinced that he had met the Messiah, the Holy One of God, that he brought his brother Simon to meet Jesus. And Jesus then tapped Simon to be his special follower, even changing his

name from Simon to Peter, which means the Rock. We are in the church season, I'm calling, the Season of Many Epiphanies – where we are looking for the many ways that Jesus made himself known to us. Which is what an Epiphany is. Peter always recognized Jesus, though he didn't always understand what he was looking at. Still, Peter helped others to meet Jesus as well.

Because Peter was a solid guy. Jesus could trust him to be exactly who he said he was, sometimes for good and sometimes not so good.

It's true Peter had his rough spots . On the one hand he recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, but on the other hand, he tried to talk him out of going to Jerusalem to die on the cross. Which seems like something a good friend would do, except that Jesus knew that getting in trouble with the authorities because of what he taught about God and losing his life at their hands, was something that he had to do. It was the thing that was going to defeat Voldemort, I mean Satan. So Peter got in trouble for trying to talk Jesus out of it. "Get Behind me Satan," Jesus said. That had to hurt.

And of course there was the time Peter tried to walk on water, and sank. Or when he tried to save Jesus from being arrested, and cut off someone's ear. He got in trouble for that too. Then when things got really bad after Jesus was arrested, Peter denied he even knew him. Three times. That was probably the worst.

In all of these things, Peter repented and Jesus forgave him. Peter learned things the hard way.

Does anyone here tend to learn things the hard way?

So that probably makes Peter a good Patronus, or Patron Saint for us.

And I think that *Expecto Patronum* is something we might want to get up and shout more often – when things get scary or uncertain for us as a faith community named after St Peter. *Expecto Patronum*. It means expect help. Expect your patron to help you. And here is where Peter's good points come in, the things that we might expect to help us to be followers of Jesus.

Peter wasn't afraid to speak his mind courageously – so like I said, he announced that Jesus as the Messiah, perhaps faster than anybody, except maybe his brother, depending on which Gospel you read. He was always asking Jesus questions, and he was devoted to him. And later, after Jesus had been crucified, died and rose again, and went back to heaven, Peter helped start the early church, and gather those first members together. He said amazing, inspiring things, because the Holy Spirit told him just what to say. He helped patch up arguments between members of the early church communities – because everyone was really different from one another, and they often got in fights about what God wanted them to eat, or who was most important, or what faith looked like. Churches can still be like that. Which is why it's good to have Peter's example.

So what can we expect to learn from a patronus like Peter – we can learn faithfulness and loyalty. And we can learn how to patch things up when our faith gets weak, or when we fail to be the friend that we would like to be. We can learn courage, and we can learn from our mistakes. We can let God give us the things to say and the wisdom and guts to say them, like Peter was able to do after he received God's Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

And we can learn to fish. For people. Which was the very first thing that Jesus taught Peter how to do. Peter learned how to do that by following, and watching, and listening and trying it out himself. He learned

it by staying with a community of sometimes irritating people through thick and thin, and sharing his gifts of leadership and courage and outspokenness.

But mainly Peter learned to fish for people by practicing. That means being with people and being willing to tell them about Jesus, or about this faith community, or about what gives you hope.

There are all sorts of stories about Peter in the bible. And there are letters that he is thought to have written. One of them, the first letter of Peter, gives I think the best advice on how to fish for people.

It goes like this: Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope. (1 Peter 3:15)

I think that's good advice. Keep the reason for your hope on the tip of your tongue, so that it's ready to share if anyone should ask you. And if you are really at a loss for words just think about St. Peter's and shout: *Expecto Petronum!*

Amen.