

Rev. Yugo Suzuki's sermon

7/ 26/09 **"Peter, Our Brother in Christ" Luke 11: 9–13**

Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find."

What is it that we should ask? What is it that we are to seek? It is God's grace and mercy revealed through Jesus Christ.

It was Peter who understood these words of the master best.

Peter was a fisherman and the number one disciple of Jesus. But he was not perfect by any means. He meant well, but made mistakes and was often scolded by Jesus.

For example, when Jesus spoke of his imminent death on the cross, Peter pulled him aside and said to him, "This should not happen to you." At that, Jesus sternly rebuked him, "Get behind me, Satan."

Peter betrayed Jesus three times the night before the crucifixion. Accused of having been Jesus' disciple in the courtyard of the high priest's residence, Peter said to the accuser, "I don't know him. I don't know what you are talking about."

After the resurrection of Jesus, however, Peter became the main leader of the church in Jerusalem, responsible for the lives of the Jewish Christians.

Ten years later, however, Peter, the leader of the Jerusalem church, would be sternly rebuked by Paul for his failure to be faithful to the Gospel of Christ.

Paul, as you know, was a convert from a persecutor of Christians to an ardent disciple of the resurrected Christ. In contrast to Peter, Paul was a highly educated Jew, thoroughly versed in Greek-Roman culture as well as in Jewish religious laws and customs.

Eventually Paul settled himself in the city of Antioch, a large cosmopolitan city of Greek-speaking people. His mission to the Gentiles proved to be quite a success.

Peter's church in Jerusalem, on the other hand, was another story. They faced a serious problem. The problem was this. The Christian proclamation of freedom from the Torah, the laws of Moses, became the target of criticism by the believers of Judaism. Some Christians were stoned. Some others were imprisoned.

In order to ease the tension, Peter tried to show to the believers of Judaism that Christians were not enemies of the Torah, the Jewish religious laws. So under the leadership of Paul, Christians observed the law just like other Jews.

So far so good. But trouble arose when Peter visited Paul's church in Antioch. As I said, most of the members of the Church in Antioch were gentiles.

Peter refused to eat with Greek Christians for the reason that the Torah prohibited sharing a meal with the Gentiles. We may say that this was Peter's clumsy way of protecting the Christians under his tutelage from religious persecution.

To Paul, however, this was a complete betrayal of the Gospel of Christ in whom there was neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, men nor women.

So one Sabbath day, before the entire congregation of the Antioch church, Paul severely rebuked Peter. Peter's credibility as a Christian leader was in shambles.

And yet, Peter did not remain despondent for long. He picked himself up again. He asked for God's guidance; he sought God's forgiveness. Later Peter traveled as far as to the city of Rome and boldly proclaimed the Gospel of Christ there.

Church tradition tells us that in the reign of emperor Nero, Peter was crucified head down as a martyr for Christ.

From the life of Peter, we can learn one important thing. Every time Peter made a mistake, and he did make many, he repented, and forgiveness was rendered to him each time. Peter is our brother in Christ.

Jesus' words are ringing clear even today. "Ask, and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened."

Thanks be to God.