"You duped me Lord, and I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, and you triumphed." (Jeremiah 20:7-9) There is a problem with this translation of the Hebrew word patah to dupe. The meaning goes beyond the verb duped. The Jewish Theologian, Abraham J. Heschel, first pointed out this error in translation in his 1962 book, The Prophets. The verb patah, found elsewhere in the Jewish Scriptures, is more commonly translated to seduce, specifically as an older man seduces a younger woman. So our quote above is better rendered, "Lord, you seduced me, and I was seduced. You were too strong for me, and you prevailed." This is a far darker connotation to this verse and an indication of the depth of Jeremiah's struggle with God.

The gravity of Jeremiah's encounter with God first struck me when this scripture was proclaimed the Sunday after I returned from a weeklong solitary retreat at Ghost Ranch in the desert of northern New Mexico. This was one of those experiences that can change one forever. Just a month before the retreat I lost my brother Charles, a delayed casualty of the Vietnam War. It was also just a few months before we would engage in a second fruitless war in Iraq and there were much talk and posturing to sell this war to the American people. Though I was totally unaware at the time this situation set the stage for my encounter with God in the desert. Clearly, I was 'set up.'
Like Jeremiah, I was not interested in changing my current plan. I thought I knew how God wanted me to serve the Church. My plan did not require me to take a radical stance on peace and justice, a stance that both Jesus and Jeremiah proclaimed. A little context… I am a retired Air Force Colonel, and I have always had a hawkish stance, so on my way back to Arizona, I was taken aback when I could not pull up my usual reasons for engaging in the upcoming Iraq war. I kept my "temporary" political disorientation to myself. In the following weeks when it became obvious that I could no longer support the impending war, I realized that I could find no good reason for war - period. I had been duped; seduced by the love of God. I tried to resist coming to terms with my new outlook, but it became "like a fire burning in my heart." Stranger still was that it was not something I chose – it chose me.

I soon realized, to my relief, that I had not become a pacifist. In reflecting on our Gospel reading this week, Peter tries to convince Jesus not to go to Jerusalem, lest the predictions of his demise come to fruition. Peter was arguing for Jesus to take the pacifist stance. Jesus would have none of that. Jesus was not a pacifist; he was, however, non-violent. Faithful Christians are called to be non-violent, but to confront injustice by speaking truth to power. This is what both Jeremiah and Jesus did in their prophetic role. While this role employs non-violent means, it does not mean they will be spared the violence of others. It requires strength and courage, tempered with restraint.

Initially, Peter and the other disciples did not show much strength and courage – witness their abandonment of Jesus at his arrest and Peter's denials during the trial. Peter was not one to show much restraint – witness his cutting off the ear of the High Priest's servant. (John 18:10) The qualities of strength, courage, and restraint are only developed over time, and by the grace of God. I continue to strive and struggle to develop qualities that will help me as one who has been seduced by God. In the meantime, I recall the rebuke of Jesus toward Peter and I endeavor to "get behind Him." As of yet, I think as a man, not as God. Will you join me in wrestling with this passionate Lover as we discern the way to Jerusalem?