

Friday April 3, 2015. Good Friday. Meditations by Reverend Meghan Farr, Curate. St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Gladstone. John 18:1-19:42.

Meditation 1 (John 18:1-27)

One thing that can certainly be said of the four Gospel writers, they are brutally honest when it comes to the shortcomings and failings of the first disciples. They don't try to paint them in a perfect light or idealize them into superheroes of faith. Instead, we are shown their "clay feet."¹ That is to say, though we know the end story—how these first disciples took up Christ's commission to go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the trinity—it is through these early Gospel accounts that we see the flaws and weaknesses of these men and women and how they grow and change. We see how they don't understand, how they make mistakes and how they are challenged and tested before being transformed from hesitant followers into dynamic leaders. Perhaps the most dramatic change and the disciple whose clay feet we see revealed again and again in the gospel narratives is that of Simon called Peter. In these hours before Christ's death, Peter's experiences change his life. He who swore vehemently to never deny Christ even unto death will do so three times and then flee from the one he proclaimed Messiah out of fear and despair. The rock upon which Jesus said he would build his Church, will ultimately hit rock bottom.

When the guards of the high priest come to arrest Jesus in the garden, Peter reacts to protect Jesus, raising a sword and cutting off the ear of high priest's slave. While Peter's intentions seem noble—the devoted follower defending the master he loves—in his actions, Peter is exercising his own will in stark contrast to Jesus who has submitted to the will of God. "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (John 18:11) Peter's sword is self-will but Jesus is drinking from the cup of God's will. Jesus is telling Peter he must allow God's will to unfold. How often do we take matters into our own hands instead of trusting God to work out his plan? So very often when we do, such actions lead to sin. Peter's way would have meant Jesus didn't go to the cross and God's plan of redemption would not have unfolded. Later, in trying to enter the gate into the courtyard of the high priest, a woman questions if Peter is one of Jesus' disciples and Peter says he is not. Perhaps this denial can be excused simply as an attempt to gain access into the courtyard and find out what is happening to Jesus. Yet, once inside, Peter is asked a second time if he is a disciple of Jesus' and again Peter says he is not. Perhaps his second denial is an attempt to keep attention off of himself so that he can remain in the courtyard in hopes of seeing Jesus and finding out what is happening. But, when a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off asks if he had seen Peter in the garden with Jesus, fear sets in and Peter again denies it and then the cock crows. What must have gone through Peter's mind remembering Jesus' words as he heard that crow? Other gospel accounts tell us he wept bitterly. How often are we like Peter, boldly defending Jesus when we have others to back us up but when we are on our own we remain safely silent or even deny him?²

It is possible to deny Jesus at many different levels and for many different reasons. Sometimes it might even seem justified but no way of denying Jesus, no matter how small is acceptable. If we have an opportunity to witness but remain silent, we deny him. If we see injustice and ignore it,

¹ Edward F. Markquart. "Sermons from Seattle."
www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_b_the_passion_story_GA_p2.htm

² Edward F. Markquart. "Sermons from Seattle."
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we deny him. If we bend the rules to get ahead, we deny him.³ We have all been like Peter and the disciples—we have all at times kept silent our beliefs. We have all denied Jesus is Lord in areas of our lives. We have all fled from him in fear or despair. Yet, Jesus forgave Peter and he will forgive us too if we turn from our sin and ask him. “O blessed Jesus who hast given to us the picture of the true human life, and who does reveal to us the ugliness of human sin: give us grace to see our sins, our shortcomings, our negligence which so burden thee in Gethsemane, that we may confess them with that sorrow which we must have if thy Cross and Passion are to save us.”

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

Meditation 2 (John 18:28-19:16)

“What is truth?” Pilate’s question to Jesus is pointedly ironic. He didn’t ask expecting an answer because he isn’t really concerned with the truth. Pilate wants to keep peace. Pilate doesn’t want to be involved. He is not for Jesus nor against him. He is, rather, in the middle, trying to save himself. But Jesus stands before him speaking truth, embodying truth. “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.” Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and perhaps some small part of Pilate senses that. What is truth? Pilate repeatedly tells the Jewish leaders he finds no case against Jesus. He offers to release Jesus as part of the Passover custom but the crowd, stirred up by the high priest, calls for the bandit Barabbas instead. Pilate has Jesus flogged and then brings him out in front of the crowds once again stating he finds no case against Jesus. The crowds shout “Crucify him! Crucify him!” The Jewish leaders tell Pilate under Jewish law Jesus must die because he claimed to be the son of God. John says upon hearing this, Pilate became more afraid than ever. Pilate found no fault in Jesus, he knew the truth of his innocence. What is truth? In his fear, Pilate hands Jesus over to be killed.

“Here is your king.” Like many characters in John’s gospel, Pilate himself speaks more truth than he realizes despite seeming to have no concern about truth. He wants to be rid of Jesus in such a way that he will not be responsible for Jesus’ death.⁴ In other gospel accounts Pilate washes his hands and says he is innocent of Jesus’ blood. Yet, there can be no neutrality before the cross of Christ. The cross compels us to make a choice—are you for Jesus or against him? There is no middle ground.⁵ Pilate tried to let others decide for him. What is truth? The truth was before him in Jesus and he rejected it. We also have to respond to the truth that confronts us in Jesus. What is truth for us? Jesus is confronting us, calling us to follow him as disciples, challenging us with his truth—he is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him. “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Before the Cross and the Passion, do you hear Jesus’ voice? What truth is he speaking to you?

“Almighty god, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.”

³ Justo L. Gonzalez. *Three Months with John*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2005. Pg. 155-156.

⁴ Justo L. Gonzalez. *Three Months with John*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2005. Pg. 159

⁵ Edward F. Markquart. “Sermons from Seattle.”

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Meditation 3 (John 19:17-42)

“Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” In this final act, and in his refusal to acquiesce to the demands of the high priest to change the sign to read instead, “This man said, I am King of the Jews,” Pilate again, though unknowingly, speaks truth. Written in three languages—Hebrew or Aramaic, the local language of the Jews living in Judea, Latin, the language of the Romans and Greek, the language of much of surrounding areas—any who passed by would be able to read those words hanging above the crucified Jesus. And Jesus was not crucified in some remote location. John tells us many Jews read this inscription because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. Thousands of people, perhaps even as many as one million were in Jerusalem on that Passover. How many read those words and wondered? How many searched for the truth about Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews? Pilate’s action creates a silent witness in a sign which proclaims the truth, the kingship of Jesus Christ. And just as the words of the sign serve as a witness to all who read it as they passed, so too do Jesus’ own words from the cross serve as a witness to those who heard them and to us who read them—“It is finished.” In these three words we hear Jesus witness to the accomplishment of the work God has sent him to do. God’s will has been fulfilled. In John’s gospel we do not hear cries of agony or of forsakenness because, for John, the cross is the great victory. It is the triumphant culmination of God’s mission of redemption for humanity and all of creation. “It is finished.” Having fulfilled every command of the Father and every prophesy of Scripture, Jesus voluntarily died. He gave up his Spirit.

“It is finished opens Jesus and us to glory. It is finished opens the door to I AM. It alerts us to a new reign by a glorious King who lives forever in his eternal kingdom. But he also lives forever in his faithful disciples.”⁶ We are those faithful disciples who are called to take up our crosses and follow Jesus from death to resurrection to eternal life. The way of the cross is not an easy way but we do not walk it alone. We are strengthened together as the Body of Christ and most especially we are strengthened and supported by the One who has walked the way before us. “Jesus shows us how in all the simple acts of our everyday living we manifest the glory of the cross... Like Jesus we must be willing to give ourselves over for others so that the glory of new Life might burst forth from us.”⁷

“Wherever thy glory be best served, whenever, however, there, then, and in that state let me thy servant be; only hide not from me thy divine love. Help me to trust thee to the uttermost. Teach me to serve thee as thou deserves; to give, and not to count the cost; to fight, and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to look for rest; to labor, and not ask for any reward, save that of knowing that I am doing thy will.”⁸

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⁶ Joyce Ann Simmerman, et al. *Working with the Word*. liturgy.slu.edu/GoodFridayA041814/theword_working.html

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Prayer of Dedication.