

Rev. Janet Doyle

Elmer Presbyterian Church

Maundy Thursday, April 14, 2022

Scripture: Luke 22: 7-34; Luke 22: 39-53; Luke 22: 54-62

## **Sermon: The Courtyard**

Tonight, we come to Jesus' last night with his disciples. It is the night that we remember each time we have Communion together and sit at his table. This was the night that Jesus washed his disciples' feet showing them what a servant leader looks like. Jesus didn't just tell his disciples what to do, he showed them that they had to get down on their knees and humble themselves. Jesus was teaching them, up until his last night, that there is a cost to discipleship.

Jesus not only washed their feet, but they shared the bread and cup. Jesus told them and us to do it in remembrance of him. The bread is his body broken for us and the cup is his blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

This last supper and last night with Jesus was also painful because he knew that Judas was going to betray him, and he told Peter that he was going to deny knowing him three times before the rooster crows.

That same night, after supper, they all went to the Mount of Olives and to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prayed for the disciples that they would not give in to temptation. Jesus prayed to the Father and, in human anguish, wanted this suffering to be taken away from him, but as he prayed, an angel from heaven came and strengthened him for the journey ahead. As he prayed, it said that he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. Jesus found his disciples asleep as he prayed in the garden.

Soon the officials from the temple came and after Judas kissed Jesus on the cheek, they took him away. They arrested Jesus and took Jesus to the high priest's home.

Peter followed at a distance. We follow Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, and this is where Peter continues to follow Jesus—into

the courtyard and it is in the courtyard that Peter fails and falls. Peter denies knowing Jesus in the courtyard. Jesus stands firm during his time of trial, but Peter can't stand firm in his faith during this time of trial. Jesus had prayed for him, but Peter's faith was not yet strong enough to stand with his Savior. He had been with Jesus for three years of teaching, preaching, healing and ministry to others, but when it came down to standing alone in the courtyard and a servant girl began telling the others, "THIS MAN WAS ONE OF JESUS' FOLLOWERS!"

What did Peter do when backed up against the wall? He denied knowing Jesus. Peter said, "Woman, I don't even know him!" Two more times he denied knowing Jesus and the rooster then crowed.

At that moment, as the rooster crowed, Jesus turned and looked at Peter, and suddenly the words Jesus had told him flashed before his eyes, and he left the courtyard, weeping because Jesus had known Peter's heart and strength to stand firm in his conviction and faith. After three years, Peter still wasn't able to stand strong in his faith and confess Jesus was his Lord and Savior when it really mattered.

At the Last Supper Jesus spoke to Peter saying, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers." Peter said, "Lord, I am ready to go to prison with you and even to die with you."

Clearly, Peter wasn't ready to face anything, and he didn't know what to do without Jesus by his side.

Of all the Gospel writers, Luke alone records this powerful detail of Jesus turning to look directly at Peter after his third denial.

In the Courtyard, Peter is challenged to acknowledge that he has a relationship with Jesus. The servant girl sees Peter and wants Peter to acknowledge knowing Jesus as friend. He is unable to do that, and as he stands alone warming himself by the fire, he continues to deny being one of his followers. He was accused of being a Galilean and even denies that.

Jesus was known as a prophet from Galilee and spent most of his ministry there. It was in Galilee that Jesus called fishermen and tax collectors to be his disciples. It was in Galilee that Jesus healed the sick,

fed the 5000, and taught people about the kingdom of God. So, when this person associates Peter with Galilee, the whole story of Jesus and his disciples and his ministry is coming into view. Peter denies any kind of association with Jesus and goes away weeping because of his lack of faith.

Peter's denial of knowing Jesus is in striking contrast to his earlier boast to lay down his life for Jesus.

Jesus was fully aware of what Peter was doing and saying to the others around him. Why did Peter go to the courtyard that night? He wanted to be with his Lord and Savior, but he wasn't ready for the faith testing he went through. But Jesus knew that Peter's faith was going to be strengthened by this experience of denial.

Peter knew he had failed, and he knew he could repent and begin again. Jesus knew that Peter would repent and return to him with a new heart and ready to meet the challenges of confessing and professing his faith in Jesus once again.

When Peter disowned knowing Jesus, Jesus did not disown him. We should be glad that faith in Jesus Christ means that we are forgiven of our sins when we confess them. The slate is wiped clean and there is no book kept of all our wrongs.

Jesus gave Peter that look, just like a parent looks at their children with the knowing-eye look of disappointment and concern about their decisions. That look from Jesus was a knowing look to Peter and Peter knew what he did wrong.

That knowing look to Peter awakened in Peter a sense of his sin, causing him to go out and weep bitterly. This is the purpose of Jesus' Passion, his innocent suffering and death; to save sinners like Peter, as well as you and me.

Peter's terrible realization of what he had done, and the bitter tears that he shed, produce a turning that leads to repentance, as Paul the apostle tells us, "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Peter's three denials of Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest turns into a three-fold restoration of Peter by Jesus after his resurrection, as Jesus asks Peter three times, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (John 21:15-19).

It is not Peter's love for Jesus that saves him, but Jesus' love for Peter. And if this is true for Peter, it is true for us as well. We are just like Peter, needing forgiveness and beginning again for with Jesus it is never too late.

It is not our love for Jesus that saves us, but Jesus' love for us that makes all things new, even when we, in our own lives, deny knowing Jesus to those we know or come in contact with, or we can say we know him, but our actions say otherwise.

We shouldn't forget this night what Jesus tells us, "IF ANYONE WOULD COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY AND FOLLOW ME." (Luke 9:23)

Jesus saves us by giving up his life for us. When Peter is caught in the act of denial, Jesus continues to love Peter and Jesus does the same for us.

Come to our Savior's Table tonight knowing you are a forgiven child of God, and the love of Jesus makes all things new. Stand strong in your faith and follow your Lord and Savior Jesus because he loves you so much, he died on the cross for you.

Remember the Courtyard and stand strong in your faith!