

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
"Denials & Faithfulness"

Scripture: John 18:12-27, Psalm 17:1-7

Hymns: What wondrous love is this 242, Jesus loves me, this I know 373, Guide me, O thou great Redeemer 651, All who hunger, gather gladly 534 Choruses: Blessed by your name, Create in me a clean heart, Faithful one

March 4, 2018

Communion Sunday

Rev. Steve Filyk

On a popular internet forum

Someone posted the question:

What is the biggest betrayal you have faced?

The question provoked a couple thousand comments.

I thought I'd share just one story:

"I looked up to a man who was a friend, a mentor,
and like a father figure to me.

He convinced me to leave my position
and come work for him,

he would get me promoted and help me achieve my goals.
He needed me on his team...

I went to work for him... *[PAUSE]*

and it was like Jekyll and Hyde.

He insulted me, talked about me behind my back,
used me as a scapegoat
[and] completely derailed my... career.

It took me 4 years... to get my reputation back...

[It was one] of the worst experiences of my life."ⁱ

Betrayal is one of the most harrowing of human experiences.

We open our lives to others,
And some of them betray our trust.

Do YOU have a story of betrayal?

PAUSE

In today's Gospel lesson we hear another story about betrayal.

Peter is in Jesus' inner circle.

He's that would-be under-shepherd
Whom Jesus had named the 'rock'.ⁱⁱ

In so many ways Peter appears faithful.

Earlier in the Gospel Jesus speaks of his impending departure.

Of all the disciples it is Peter who declares boldly:

"why can't I follow now?
I'll lay down my life for you!"ⁱⁱⁱ

Peter goes on to prove his commitment to Jesus.

When a detachment of soldiers and officials

Show up to arrest Jesus,
Peter pulls out a sword
And strikes the high priest's servant,
Cutting off the man's ear.

Then as Jesus is taken away to be judged

By the high priest emeritus, Anna,
Peter follows along after him.

But when Peter makes his way into the courtyard
The young woman who was the doorkeeper says to Peter,
“Aren’t you one of this man’s disciples?”

There in the courtyard Peter loses courage.
Peter confesses “No... I’m not.”

Later on Peter is warming up at a fire
And some others ask him,
“Aren’t you one of his disciples?”

He denies it again, “No, not me.”

Finally, one of the Chief Priest’s servants,
a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off,
says, “Didn’t I see you in the garden with him?”

Again, Peter denies it.^{iv}

When he’s put to the test,
bold Peter denies his association with Jesus;
The ‘rock’ disowns his identity as Jesus’ follower.
Peter betrays Jesus... three times.

Betrayal.
Not an uncommon human experience.
This sort of story is repeated again and again.

People may claim to be your friends,
But just wait till you find yourself in hot water.
Like Jesus you’ll find that few remain loyal.

Remember those words of the psalmist?

“Do not put your trust in princes,
in human beings, who cannot save.”^v

Well if you think this is kind of depressing,
It is actually much worse.

The real story isn't just that some people betray us,
But that we, ourselves, betray others.
What is true about poor Peter
is also true about ourselves.

French philosopher Albert Camus [Albert Camoo] is quote at saying:
“I used to advertise my loyalty
and I don't believe there is a single person I loved
that I didn't eventually betray.”^{vi}

In the context of today's story
Judas has sold out Jesus, Peter has repeatedly denied him,
And with the exception of that unnamed disciple
everyone else has fled.

We all end up denying and betraying each other,
Our friends and our family.

And we also turn our backs on Jesus.
In word or deed we reject him as our Lord and Savior.
We deny own deepest identities as his disciples.

What a depressing thought.
 No-one is trustworthy.
 No-one is loyal.

PAUSE

Well not quite.
 The Good News in today's story
 Is there is one who is faithful.

Look closely at today's reading an you'll notice
 How the story alternates between Peter's failures
 And Jesus' faithfulness.

"...while Peter cowers before his questioners and denies everything"
 "...Jesus stands up to his questioners and denies nothing..."^{vii}
 "...Jesus is speaking openly, Peter is doing his best to hide."viii

When Jesus is asked about his teaching and his disciples,
 he reminds the High Priest that his message has been public,
 and welcomes the testimony of witnesses.

Notice that Jesus doesn't say anything
 To deflect attention or incriminate his followers.

The Good Shepherd won't lose those sheep
 That have been entrusted to him
 but will lay down his own life for them.^{ix}

Jesus is faithful to his God
 And Jesus is faithful to his friends.
 In a world of people who will betray us
 Jesus proves faithful.

What was it that the Psalmist advised us:

“Do not put your trust in princes,
 in human beings, who cannot save...

Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
 whose hope is in the Lord their God.”^x

People will let you down.
 People will betray you.
 But God is faithful. Jesus can be trusted.

But there is more Good News.

Jesus is not just faithful.
 Jesus is also forgiving.
 Jesus seeks reconciliation
 with those who have let him down.

I mentioned how Peter betrayed Jesus
 As he was warming himself by a fire.

“Well, not very long after this, there is another... fire
 that comes into the story.
 It calls up for Peter, and for Jesus,
 the memory of this sad night.”^{xi}

This is after Jesus' death, his terrible crucifixion.

This is after Sunday morning and the empty tomb.

Peter is out fishing with some of the others disciples.

Some stranger calls from the beach,
offering advice for these anglers.

They follow his directions,
Their nets are quickly full,
they bring their boats in.

There they discover Jesus roasting some fish on a fire.

Jesus beckons them and feeds them:

Passing out the bread
And the fish to them.

And then he speaks to Peter
that disciple who had denied and betrayed him:
"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

This time Peter affirms
And does not deny Jesus:
"Yes, Master, you know I love you."

Jesus replies: "Feed my lambs."

Jesus asks this question three times over. SLOWLY
Three times Peter affirms his devotion. SLOWLY
And three times Jesus commissions him. SLOWLY

Jesus is the faithful one,
 The Good Shepherd,
 Who will not betray his followers.

And Jesus is the forgiving Lord
 Who has room in his company for those who make mistakes,
 Those who deny and betray him.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who will seek after the wayward lamb.
 Thanks be to God. Amen.

ⁱ Posted by CosmicCommie www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/1tvlo0/what_is_the_biggest_betrayal_you_have_faced/

ⁱⁱ See Mark 3:16

ⁱⁱⁱ John 13:37 MSG

^{iv} Wording scribed from John 18:17-27 MSG

^v Psalm 146:3NIV

^{vi} Albert Camus in "The Fall" www.goodreads.com/quotes/104474-i-used-to-advertise-my-loyalty-and-i-don-t-believe

^{vii} D. A. Carson *The Gospel According to John* 585,586

^{viii} N. T. Wright *John for Everyone: Part II* 107

^{ix} John 10:11

^x Ps 146:3-5

^{xi} N. T. Wright *John for Everyone: Part II* 106