

Sunday April 13 2025 - Palm/Passion Sunday – Luke 22:14-23:56

The biblical passage assigned for this week can be overwhelming, I know, as it covers so much narrative and emotional terrain.

There are many elements of today's gospel story that I could focus on. Today I am going to focus on Peter and Peter's failure to confess.

Peter is so bold and confident the night before, professing his willingness to follow Jesus to prison and even to death, but when the moment comes to demonstrate his faith, Peter fails. Not once or twice but three times Peter denies his Lord. And then Jesus looks at him. What did that look express? Disappointment, dejection, understanding, comfort? Perhaps it was the penetrating look of a friend who sees Peter to the core and reflects what he sees in his knowing glance. Imagine what that look is and what it would feel like to be Peter in that moment. And what would it feel like to anticipate what it was like for Peter to be not only forgiven but also restored, granted a position of leadership among the company of disciples, and charged to help birth this new church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter, the tradition says, will eventually follow his Lord to prison and death, and perhaps it was this moment of realizing who he really is and being forgiven, restored, and trusted that enables him to do so.

Today is only the beginning of a week of contemplation as we journey with Jesus to the cross and then the empty tomb. What stands out to me this week is that all that is said and done in this dark and difficult story is done for us. Notice that the last words of Jesus in Luke's Gospel express a willing embrace of his destiny. Jesus' life is not

torn from him. From the beginning of this narrative to the end, Jesus participates willingly in what is to happen, refusing rescue, escape, or the resort to violence. So also in these closing verses of today's reading notice that Jesus does not simply stop breathing, surrendering to a tragic fate. Rather, he commends, or gives over, his spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father. His last words are, in short, a prayer of confidence, trust, and obedience. Why? Because while his death is in many ways tragic, it is no accident. Rather, he follows this road to express God's complete solidarity with us in all things, including even the fear and experience of death, and to demonstrate that God's love is stronger than hate and that God's life is stronger than death. Jesus does not die, in other words, to make it possible for God to forgive us, but rather to show us that God already has forgiven us because God loves us.

This theme – that Jesus embraces his fate to demonstrate God's profound and life-giving love – is something that can carry us. On Maundy Thursday we will remember that Jesus' command to love others is rooted in and made possible by his profound love for us. And on Good Friday we see how many times Jesus could have avoided or changed his fate but chose not to, embracing the cross and shouting his victory cry to the heavens that all that is necessary has been accomplished, as God has once again rescued God's people, this time not merely from the oppression of Egypt but from death itself.

As we re-engage with this Holy Week journey hear again and believe that God loves you, that God believes you worthy of respect and dignity, and that God has promised to be with you and for you forever. Amen.