



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

March 20, 2022

Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

Third Sunday of Lent: Peter's denial of Jesus (John 18:12-23)

Simon Peter's denial of Jesus is one of the most heart-breaking episodes in the story of Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. It is told in all four gospels, and must have been a great source of

We often tell this story of Peter as if he is trying to save himself. He is fearful for what might happen to him if he were to be questioned further. He fears that he could be next—maybe if the people know that he is a disciple of Jesus, then they could want to arrest him as well. Out of fear, Peter lies and denies his discipleship.

In other Gospel stories Peter comes out and says, "I do not know the man," but John's telling of the story is more subtle. In John, he is asked if he is a disciple twice. Then the third time he is asked, "Were you with him in the Garden?" Peter denies it a third time, and the cock crows.

Other gospel writers tell us of Peter's anguish at realizing what he had done. They shape the story to show Peter's growing frustration and escalating denials. The story culminates with Peter weeping bitterly over the lies he had told. The Gospel of John is different

In this scene, both Peter and Jesus are being questioned about who they are. I offer you this: neither lied. When Peter denied being a disciple of Jesus, in that moment, he was telling the truth. Peter's failure as a disciple had already come.

When Jesus was arrested, the Fourth Evangelist tells us that there were 600 armed guards (a cohort). Perhaps this is an exaggeration, but the point is clear. This is an overwhelming force of men that could have arrested Jesus and his eleven remaining disciples. They choose—at Jesus request—to only arrest Jesus. John's Gospel is the only account of the arrest that includes a key detail of this arrest.

All four gospels agree that someone with Jesus that night struck the slave of the high priest in the ear. John's Gospel is the only one that names Peter as the one who strikes out in violence. This important detail informs Peter's denial. The moment Peter took up the sword, he ceased following the Prince of Peace. Jesus nearly says as much—as the way he is walking is a non-violent way that leads to the Cross. When Peter struck another man in violent retribution, he ceased following Christ's Way. When he was asked, "were you with this man in the garden?" The answer was truthfully, "no."

Two more things to consider about this moment. Peter is with an unnamed disciple. There is great mystery surrounding his companion, "the other disciple." Yet we know that this disciple knew the high priest. Which of the disciples knew the high priest? Which of the other disciples would have been allowed through the gate with-

out question? Perhaps the one who conspired with them—Judas. Peter in this moment, was following Judas, not Jesus. Finally, John's Gospel is the only one that describes a gate at this scene. For Peter to enter the gate, he must say he is not a follower of Jesus (He literally says, "I am not," as opposed to Jesus who said, "I am.").



"The Capture of Christ," Guérard, Grégoire (circa 1520). Held at the Musée Des Beaux Arts de Dijon. (Wikimedia commons)

Remember our Ash Wednesday text from John 10. To enter in Jesus' gate, you must know the shepherd's voice. Jesus even said, "I am the gate." Peter has finally left Jesus' gate and entered into the gate of Judas and those who would crucify Christ. He wasn't fearful he would be arrested too. There were 600 men to arrest Jesus. Peter lashed out in violence. They *still* left him alone. They had plenty of manpower to arrest him if they wanted, but they didn't. The only wanted Jesus. Peter had no reason to fear. He was not lying when he said he was no longer following Jesus. When he acted in violence, his relationship with the "Way, the truth, and the life" was over.

It is good to dwell in this broken relationship. Peter's choices led him into another gate. It is good to recognize the times when we choose the way of the sword instead of the way of the shepherd. It is good to sit with Peter in the courtyard of fear, insecurity, retaliation, and vengeance. This is what Lent is about. It is a chance to recognize the times we ignore the green pastures and still waters that our Good Shepherd offers.

Peter will be restored. So will we. For each Three times Jesus tells Peter to "care for his sheep." The way to restoration is to care for one another. The way to restore our relationship with Christ is to build our relationship with one another. We will get there in time.