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National Presbyterian Church

## Following Jesus: Living With(out) Regret

Luke 22:47-62

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In our sermons through this year we've been looking at Jesus' life through the account we have in Luke's Gospel. In recent weeks – the weeks leading up to Good Friday and Easter – our focus has been on the events that take place in the *last week* (and now) the *last hours* of Jesus' life.

Now some may be saying, “*why do that when we are caught in the middle of this pandemic? Shouldn't we be talking about that?*” To which my answer would be: “*Well, sort of, yes, we do and we will.*”

But I would want add this: that everyone talking about the pandemic always does it from a particular point of view, and we *are always having* to ask ourselves “just what *is* the point of view? What's the context or framework or lens through which this story of the pandemic is being told?

For example,

- Is your lens **the Television**? (how many hours watched this week), and if so, is it Fox News, MSNBC, CNN? or PBS?
- Or, is your lens, **the web**, and if so, what sites do you visit, or emails do you open? Is it CDC.gov or NIH.gov? Or the myriad of email circulars doing the rounds?
- Or is the lens, **your friends and family** in your apartment or house, or on the phone, or on Facebook or Instagram?

Every event has a context that gives it shape and meaning, a lens or frame through which we interpret the event. And *what Christians claim*, and *what I believe profoundly* even more than I did when I first became a follower of Christ as a teenager, is that “***THE***” *story through which we are to see and interpret life and within which we will find the best life, the good life, is the story of the Bible; and, in particular, the story of Jesus.*

And the power of the story *for us today*, lies precisely in its ability to feed our minds and souls at such a time as this.

**So our Christian practice, not just in times of crisis, but every week** is to pull back from all these other sources or frameworks through which we are told to view life, and to turn on, tune in, and lean in to *this* story: the story of Jesus at the heart of the Bible, with the prayer that God would give us his word to help us grow stronger in faith and love and joy, today.

Let's pray for this now.

## SCRIPTURE

### Luke 22:47-62

<sup>47</sup>While Jesus was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came,  
and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them.  
He approached Jesus to kiss him;  
<sup>48</sup>but Jesus said to him,  
“Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?”  
<sup>49</sup>When those who were around him saw what was coming,  
they asked, “Lord, should we strike with the sword?”  
<sup>50</sup>Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear.  
<sup>51</sup>But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him.  
<sup>52</sup>Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the  
elders who had come for him,  
*“Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit?  
<sup>53</sup>When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me.  
But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!”*  
<sup>54</sup>Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s  
house.

But Peter was following at a distance. <sup>55</sup>When they had kindled a fire in the  
middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them.

1. <sup>56</sup>Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, “This  
man also was with him.”

<sup>57</sup>But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.”

2. <sup>58</sup>A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, “You also are one of them.”  
But Peter said, “Man, I am not!”

3. <sup>59</sup>Then about an hour later still another kept insisting,  
“Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.”

<sup>60</sup>But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about!”

At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed.

<sup>61</sup>The Lord turned and looked at Peter.

Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him,

“Before the cock crows today . . . you will deny me three times.”

<sup>62</sup>And he went out and wept bitterly.

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**In today’s Scripture passage we read about two people** whom we surely do not want to be  
like! -- two would-be friends of Jesus who betray him and let him down in Jesus’ most difficult  
hour, and who, afterwards, live with a huge burden of *remorse and regret*.

#### **1. To begin with there’s Judas Iscariot**

- Who betrays Jesus for 30 pieces of silver

- Handing him over to the religious leaders and the Temple Police
- to be taken away and tried, and crucified.

In the gospels we're told very little about Judas, except that

- he was one of Jesus' inner circle of disciples (Matt. 10:4)
- he was the treasurer of the group of Jesus' followers
- And that he was a lover of money (a thief – John 12:6)
- And that he stayed with Jesus all the way through the last supper, until just an hour or two before the betrayal (Matt. 26:25)

But *somehow*, at *some* stage, **Judas was grabbed by disillusionment or disappointment** and whatever commitment he had had to Jesus – simply vanished.

Perhaps his DISAPPOINTMENT was **that Jesus had not become a political leader** (as many people hoped the Messiah would be); a political “savior” to rescue the people of Israel from their loss of freedom under the rule of the “Big Bad” Roman Empire. (*Sometimes we expect this today of our own political leaders – that their leadership would be “messianic,” and invariably we too get crushed by disappointment*).

**OR maybe Judas** saw Jesus as a powerful **religious leader** who somehow would recapture the temple in Jerusalem – the heart and center of Jewish faith – “taking it back” from the present corrupt priestly leadership (*which, we know, other faithful Jewish people couldn't stand either: so some “hightailed it” to down to the desert, by the Dead Sea – to form the Qumran Community*). But with Jesus now in Jerusalem it must have become clear to Judas (or anyone else) that Jesus was *not* going to be the religious leader who would take over the control of God's temple from the present religious establishment (and “make it great again”).

- He may have turned over tables *in the temple* and created a ruckus because of the religious marketplace there, that had disrupted worship!
- And he may have taught *in the temple* every day as other Rabbis did
- But he clearly didn't have the inclination or the will to start a revolution and control it as the priests did.

And, so – as with so many of our own religious leaders in recent decades – it's not impossible that Judas just gave up! threw in the towel! slumped into disillusionment with Jesus! And, not being able to beat the opposition – *joined them!*

Of course, what Judas almost certainly couldn't see or accept (whether his vision was political or religious, or both) was that *Jesus was indeed a leader whose leadership would have enormous ramifications, both spiritually and politically, over the centuries*; but *not* as someone who would become a well-known public figure using the normal trappings of power. That was not his style.

Rather, his whole mission was based on *sowing seeds* and *laying foundations* -- pretty subtle and boring stuff – that most of the time undermined the status quo quietly and slowly and then undergirded a new kind of society: like the root system of a tree, or an underground aquifer, ***or even a levee or a pump house!***

**My son lives near New Orleans**, and my wife and I go there as often as we can to see our grandkids (well, to see our son and daughter in law, too, of course!). You cannot pass through New Orleans *as a visitor* without seeing the two things which allow the city to exist: the levees and the pump stations.

But with the passage of time, what becomes very easy is *not to notice them* at all; to forget that life in New Orleans depends on them . . . not to notice them, that is, until, of course they fail, **as did the levees in 50 places, and as did all the pump stations in Jefferson and Orleans parishes by 8:30 p.m. on August 29, 2005. And the storm won; Katrina won!**

Jesus' leadership was and is like that: giving our lives a firm foundation; not generally spectacular, but powerful enough to give normal human beings "Spectacular Strength" in the storms of life.

But, apparently, that's not what Judas was looking for. And, to make a fast buck, for whatever reason, "DISAPPOINTED JUDAS" sold his soul and his friend for 30 pieces of silver – ***much to his eternal regret.***

## **2. WHEREAS "WEAK PETER" just couldn't hack it when the going got tough!**

In the case of Peter, there's no doubt that he actually wanted to be a real follower of Jesus passionately, and that he'd managed to change his conception of Jesus over time *from what he wanted Jesus to be, to accepting who Jesus was, AS HE WAS.*

There's an incident told in John's gospel (Jn. 6:14ff), where people wanted to take Jesus away to make him a political king. And when Jesus wouldn't play along, lots of people left him (Jn. 6:66). And at that time Jesus turned to Peter and said, "You too?" To which Peter said "No, I'm sticking with you – *you alone have the words of eternal life*" (Jn.6:68).

Peter didn't quite get Jesus, but he was willing to allow *whoever Jesus was* to shape his life. And this event seems to have been a critical turning point in his life.

**Robert Coles**, who was professor of psychiatry at Harvard, in a wonderful book called The Secular Mind (1999), tells about an interview that his friend, poet Carlos Williams, had conducted with a woman in Patterson, New Jersey. Let me quote:

- The woman was a young grandmother, born in Italy, who came to the United States when she was fifteen. She was married, and had brought up a family, and now was helping her daughter bring up another family. She said (to Carlos Williams): "It's become different going to church here than it was when I was in Italy and when I first came here.
- Back then, I used to sit and talk to God and try to figure out what God wanted. And tried to please God.
  - Now I mostly think about what is going on in my life and my kids' lives and I ask God to make it better.
  - It used to be that I prayed to God *that I would learn what God wanted from me, and how God wanted me to behave.* I wanted God's help to be that kind of person, the kind God wanted.
  - But now I pray to God *that God help us with this problem or that, and I'm only asking God to help out with things.*

So this woman could see herself going in the wrong direction: from being under Jesus' leadership, to trying to get Jesus to conform to what she wanted!

**This is somewhat like Judas -- BUT Peter was different.** Peter had turned the corner and was now heading in Jesus' direction. He somehow knew that *his life* needed to be tied into *Jesus' life* and he desperately wanted to stick with him. So on the dark night of Jesus' arrest, he actually followed all the way to the High Priest's house where Jesus was interrogated. **And then it**

**happened**: *all of a sudden the weakness took over; the fear. And Peter's will and courage collapsed.* The human weakness we all share. And he abandons Jesus to save his skin.

Peter was following at a distance.

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<sup>56</sup>Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said,

“This man also was with him.” <sup>57</sup>But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.”

<sup>58</sup>A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not!”

<sup>59</sup>Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, “Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.” <sup>60</sup>But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about!”

At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. <sup>61</sup>The Lord *turned* and looked at Peter.

*(DR: what did Peter see in Jesus eyes? judgment? Sadness? Love)*

Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today . . . you will deny me three times.” <sup>62</sup>**And he went out and wept bitterly.**

**Regret? Remorse? Such terrible things to live with**, whether through disillusionment, or weakness, or some other reason . . . it really doesn't matter.

And surely these are things that God desperately wants us to avoid, or deal with, **in these difficult days in which we live, as well. In days when**

- the questions are many
- and anxieties and fears abound
- and truth is hard to come by
- and jobs and saving are shrinking
- and if you want to get in the blame game – and get mad, there's plenty of blame to go around
- and relationships can be hard – whether the absence of relationships (loneliness), or, the reverse: too much family closeness!

All of these and any can lead us into **bad or selfish behaviors** that, at the time or later, **we might live to regret!**

So what are we to do? Well, let me leave you with three words to keep in mind, to avoid the lingering regret of either Judas or Peter!

**The first word is “confess” – our sin and weakness**; that we'll always be in need Jesus' mercy; there will always be times when we blow it like Judas or Peter, whether by decision or in a moment of weakness. And there's no reason to hide this fact: we're ALL in the same boat. The Bible says that

If we deny that we have sin, the truth is not within us but if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8)

As far as we can tell Judas never did that; but Peter did (see John 21)!

*Be specific. Make a list of all your actions or in-actions leading to regrets.*

*And bring them to Jesus, who wants to take them off your heart and shoulders, and hang them, put them to death, on his cross. He died to bury our regrets.*

So, the first word is “confess.”

**Then, the second word is “Decide or Determine” to put Jesus first, to allow him to set our direction**

Do you remember the words close to the end of Jesus’ teaching in what we call “the Sermon on the Mount” (in Matthew 7)?

<sup>24</sup>“Everyone then who *hears these words of mine and acts on them* will be like a wise person who built his house on rock. <sup>25</sup>The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.”

What Jesus is saying is that if you’ve “bought into” Jesus’ vision for your life, and you allow his word to shape you then no storm can bring you down.

He’ll hold you fast until his mission for your life is done!

- As the Bk of Hebrews says: *He’ll never fail you or forsake you.* (Heb.13:5)
- As the Apostle Paul says: *His grace will be sufficient for you.* (2 Cor. 12:9).

So, what’s needed here is a prayer that echoes the first three steps of AA:

Step 1: Confess to God that your life is not heading in the right direction.

Step 2: Tell God, that his power is what you need . . . *then*

Step 3. Make a decision to turn your will and your life over to Jesus as Lord

Have you ever done that? ***Do it again! Or for the first time***

1. Confess your sin and weakness
2. Determine to Put Jesus First

**And then, the third word is “Check”** – check your personal foundation.

This time warp we’re in ***is a time for some introspection.*** **Dig deep** into your soul *like probing to see if the levees and pumps are working in New Orleans!* **And ask,** deep down

- *What are my hopes and dreams?*
- *What am I most scared of losing or becoming?*
- *Who or What am I living for?*
- *Has Jesus become like a talisman, a “mere protector” of hopes and dreams that are more MINE than HIS?*

Don’t find out too late . . . that the levees and pumps don’t work! Take time, get a notebook; spill this out to yourself, and to God

**Three words: C.heck – D.ecide – C.onfess!**

*That’s strange! . . . that comes to CDC! . . . the best folks to consult at such a time as this!!*

- Don’t follow Judas or Peter in their moment of crisis,
- but in our moment of crisis, shrink the potential and lingering effect of regret, by following the CDC!

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