

St. Bartholomew

3rd Sunday in Lent

March 23, 2014

John 18:12-27

During this church season of Lent, our scriptures show Jesus gradually making His way towards Jerusalem.

Gradually making his way towards the time and place of His execution - where He will make His holy sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. A couple of Sunday's ago, we saw the raising of Lazarus from the dead - revealing the absolute power of Jesus over death. Last Sunday, we saw Jesus washing the feet of His followers - loving them, forgiving them, to the end.

And today, we see two of Jesus' followers repay Him with betrayal - and cowardice. First, just before the verses in our reading today, Judas leads the soldiers to Jesus to arrest him. And in our verses today, the disciple Peter finds himself in the courtyard - just outside the place where they are giving Jesus His first trial. Peter is standing just outside, warming himself by the fire - warming himself directly alongside the very people that have arrested Jesus and are planning for His execution.

Now, on the one hand, you can pity Peter. He has found himself in the wrong place and the wrong time. And he is absolutely helpless, to turn back the tide of the events and the tragedy that is unfolding. Peter is in the

wrong place at the wrong time - as the lady guarding the gate turns to him and says, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" And Peter has a decision to make - whether to risk his life, and own up to his allegiance to Jesus - or to compromise his loyalty - to compromise his faith - to compromise his integrity.

Well, like most of us probably would have, Peter took the easy way out. Taking the easy way out... For instance, let's say that you are working in a department store - and there is a big sale going on. But your boss says, that if someone does not mention the sale - you are to ring up the items at the regular price. What do you do? Do you risk your job - your livelihood - for your integrity? For one day?

Or, you are the doctor or nurse on duty - and you have to give this patient a certain medicine - because that is the one that the insurance company will cover. You know that this other medicine, just a few dollars more expensive would work alot better. What do you do?

Or, you are trying to get rid of your old car so that you can buy and new one. You know that there are a couple of things wrong with your old car - but you decide not to tell the dealer - because they might not take it as a trade-in. What do you do?

You and I find ourselves in these moral dilemmas all the time, throughout our lives. Some of our moral dilemmas are larger, some are smaller - but many times, when you find yourself having to make some difficult decision - or taking the easy way out.... you take the easy way out because it would just cost too much to speak the truth.

And so, as hard as you try, sometimes you find yourself to be faithless - or at minimum, showing your sinful side. You would LIKE to represent Jesus fully and flawlessly - but you can't.

So it happens to us as individuals - but the same thing happens with the larger church as well - throughout the ages, the institution of the church has not always chosen the right moral side.

When Martin Luther was faced between supporting the freedom and rights of the peasants - or supporting the Princes and the Kings that owned them, Luther said that the government was given by God. He backed the power of the authorities - and so over 100,000 peasants were slaughtered. Maybe it would have occurred regardless, but Luther lent his voice to the ruthless dictators.

Or the whole Spanish Inquisition during the Middle Ages - where the church took on the role of torturing and killing the enemies of the church - which just so happened

to be the enemies of the state as well. And so the integrity of the institution of the church stands compromised forever.

There are plenty of other failures of individuals or even of the church institution. We are a flawed people - and it will certainly be reflected in our institutions, and in our lives. We would wish that it was not this way - but we must admit to our failings. Confess our brokenness.

And yet, there is another side to this shame and this brokenness and this sinful humanness that we bear. The other side is that, just as Peter was standing in the courtyard, getting all chummy with Jesus' captors.... Just as Peter was caving in on His loyalty to Jesus....

Jesus Himself was inside the room - He was there at the trial for His life - Jesus was there as they were clearly deciding His fate. And He did not budge an inch. In His integrity and in His faithfulness, Jesus spoke directly to the priest Annas - challenging them to prove His guilt with words that He has spoken in their own Temple and synagogues. Even as He was struck by the guard, Jesus questioned the offender.

Jesus is standing firm - even though He knows that this will lead to His death. He could have backed out. He could have avoided being arrested. He could have

compromised. But Jesus chose to remain faithful to His mission. He chose to remain faithful to suffering the sacrifice of the life of the Son of God - His life - for the salvation of the whole world. Though we are imperfect - though we are, at times, faulty and faithless.... Jesus is always faithful. Jesus is always there. Always supporting you. Always guiding you. Always strengthening you no matter how you may fail.

That's the lesson to be learned in today's scripture reading, even though one of the chosen disciples - even though Peter failed - Jesus forgave Peter, and even used Peter's life to help start the church - which would carry Jesus' gospel down through the ages.

That's something that is very important to remember. At times in the church, church people will sometimes say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing. Sometimes the whole church will represent Jesus badly. We as followers of Jesus - we are not Jesus.

God does not call you to believe in me or to believe in the church member that you always thought was such a great person. God does not call you to believe in the institution of the church. God calls you to believe in Jesus - the One who remains faithful forever. The One who

stands in the face of all trials - even death to give you eternal life.

It is an interesting thing though - this brokenness of ours. Even though we would prefer not to be this broken - it does help others to relate to us. Since we know our sin so well - we are not high and mighty, better than other people. In fact, those outside of the church can look at us and say, "If Jesus can love them and care for them. Then Jesus might be willing to love me and care for me too."

Maybe that is what God is doing with all of our brokenness. In the Name of Jesus.

Amen