

## Lent Sermon Series - St Johns Church, Woodbridge - Sunday March 7<sup>th</sup> 2010- 3. Denial

### .Memory - Why have I come to talk with you Danny?

Nearly 2000 years ago Jesus quietly told Peter - 'Before the cock crows you will **say three times that you do not know me.**' The story is recorded in all four gospels and theological doctorate have been written on the minor differences between the four accounts, I don't think it matters much if one cockerel crowed three times or three cockerels crowed once - we get the picture - 'I was never there, I've never met the man , why are you picking on me ?'

If you are sitting near someone - tell them **how you think Peter felt** as Jesus, possibly with a raised eyebrow, told him - Peter you will tell people you did not know me. What does that feel like? Peter tells Jesus he is willing to die for him... And he means it... the words literally translate 'the life of me on behalf of you' - not I will follow you in going to a martyrs death but literally - let me die for you. How did Peter feel?

Christianity is an intimate religion - it welcomes truth telling, confession, deep relationships and deepening understanding .The fruits of the spirit are love, joy peace and understanding. **We all love Peter** - possibly for the wrong reasons ...he was everyman, the spokesperson for the disciples, the one who said what the others were probably thinking. Jesus often handles people in a gentle and personal way so it comes as a shock to learn some of the things he said to Peter....we rarely tell our friends that they will deny our friendship or even that they will say they never knew us when the going gets tough. Few of us label thoughts of our friends Satanic.

Last week we learnt about the betrayal of Jesus and this week the topic set is denial - in many ways I would prefer to talk about the patience of Jesus - one of his best friends was completely missing the point, Like every good teacher Jesus checks out not what they remember but what his disciples had learnt,,,

At **Caesarea Philippi** Peter got it - he truly got it - he answered the question well ... If you are near a bible please turn to **Mark chapter 8**. In eleven short verses 27 - 39 Peter goes from top of the class to expulsion from the remedial stream.... See Verse 27 'But who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Christ'. This is the hinge of Mark's book, the disciple understands what all the teaching and miracles were about and then Peter gives his understanding of the future role for the Son of man - rejection, trial, death, resurrection. My version states '**Jesus told them plainly what would happen**' (verse 32)

This was all too shocking for Peter - he took Jesus to one side and told him not to talk like that ... Jesus words ring hard down through the centuries - '**go away from me Satan - you don't care about the things of God , but only about things people think are important**'. In Mark chapter 8 Jesus warns that if people are ashamed of me and my teaching, the son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in Glory. Jesus words to Peter can be very gentle but some phrases sound like those used in a family quarrel.

Let us return to **John chapter 13 .- verse 34** -Jesus tells his disciples about death and resurrection - he almost tells them his living will - a new command - love one another - **as I have loved you** - one of the most profound things Jesus ever said - intimate , clear , profound and life enhancing. While there was little new in a commandment to love (love your neighbour - it can be found in the fifth book of the old testament - (Leviticus chapter 19, verse 18) the new commandment was to love others with the depth, patience, and the understanding of God, The disciples are invited to reflect on the way Jesus has treated them - they could look back on the foot washing before the meal, the teaching, the company, the laughter and the relationship.

Now that Judas had gone out into the night Jesus knew that his great moment was rushing up to him like a tidal wave... as Bishop Tom Wright of Durham describes it. Jesus wants his disciples to understand what his 'going away' means for their future life , their sorrow ,their joy and their mission in the world. The phrase he uses to describe himself '**the son of man**' was rich in theological meaning for Jews who had read the prophecy of Daniel - we heard last week how Jesus used the word Glory - glory glory, glory, glory, glory - five times in two verse John chapter 13 -31 and 32 to signify coming events... Jesus is overwhelmed with the significance of

what is to come and Peter gets the wrong end of the stick...Peter like many of us Peter zeros in on what will happen to me? Like a small child he refuses to be comforted by 'in a little while.

Having heard all the profound things Jesus has said, Peter asks '**where are you going?**' Jesus parks the question and reassures him that he will follow later ...like telling a small child you will be back in twenty minutes Peter retorts I want to go now . Why can't I go now? I don't want later... I want now. I think we get the message Peter.

We know how brave Peter was; he had laid down his nets to wander about with an itinerant preacher in dangerous times. Now he was ready for martyrdom - a sign of great love and sadly a selfish wasteful act born of bravado and his own will. Jesus knows that Peter will be transformed by his resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit but at this point Peter is clinging to Jesus trying to prevent Jesus doing his father's will. Jesus is incredibly patient.

Jesus does not ask his followers to slavishly copy him and the things he did - **foot washing is not that important** but the life, Jesus way of life, his way and manner of life - the pattern the shape and the example are what we have to learn from. To wash someone else's feet in that age meant to act as a slave, to humble yourself, to seek the good of others. If you or I took to washing the feet of our dinner guests we would shame them exposing their old socks, bunions and dirty toe nails - they might think us quaint, pious or members of a strange sect. On the other hand they would probably turn down future invitations. The message is one of hospitality, good manners, quiet humility and service. Love is not showing off, self or self will - it can be self sacrifice.

As the old preachers used to say the word SIN has a capital I in the middle for a reason . . . . .

Likewise love for others **seeks out the things that we can share** - one of the taunts of the Atheists and Humanists is - look at the Christians - they fight wars, kill and maim each other over trivial disagreements . Jesus did not say 'love only those who reinforce your sense of who you are 'He said **all people will know that you are my followers if you love each other.** Like Peter we can get all too attached to 'What is going to happen to me?' I want to follow you now. Like Peter we were not born patient people. Like two spies going behind enemy lines Peter and another disciple got into the inner court of the temple to find out what was happening to Jesus. Peter was loyal, quick tempered, and cold and tired. He had recently maimed one of the men sent to arrest Jesus. When you have time read John chapter 18. Denial was not part of Peter's plan. Peter learnt a lot from his mistake and my question this week has been what we can learn as followers of Jesus.

Jesus is incredibly patient - with Peter and with us. It is often our impatience, immaturity and our drive to please that leads to a fall. How can we forget to **listen to God?** Too many of our prayers and thought tell god what we want him to tell us to do. I fail in the wish to be loyal to Jesus as he is - substituting how I would like him to be. As we get deeper into Lent Jesus asks us to be patient and to practice our listening skills - to spend some time being, not doing. Asked what he would do differently if he had his time again Billy Graham told his interviewer that he would have spent more time in listening, prayer and preparation.

If my first is in patient listening to God my second is **claiming God's love in handling our fear.**

Jesus turning on Peter must have been upsetting for the other disciples. Big, bluff, honest, loyal Peter a man very close to Jesus falls into denial - if he is going to fall from grace what about the rest of us? Jesus tells his disciples to trust in him (chapter 14 verse one) and walk on in their faith. Despite all the talk of death and the sadness of parting God reaffirms his love, they are to say Abba - father just as Jesus has relied on his father. This passage encourages us to **live God's reality** rather than our own feelings to encourage one another and to love, as he loves us. To engage in the battle Jesus is waging we have to forget our own weakness gain Jesus self confidence and control our feelings. In his letter John writes - **Perfect love drives out fear (1 john 4 .18)**

Waiting on God, loving as he loves us , trusting and driving out fear - quite a tall order for little fellows like ourselves - who want to go with Jesus now - not in a little while .. Now...we are active people at this Church and we love doing, not waiting, not being - doing. .. Peter put himself in a place of great danger. Denial crept up on Peter - first through a servant girl's quiet enquiry, then again in a more public place, finally by a man who possibly recognised him as being involved in the garden sword attack. A deep study of Peter's life might claim

that Peter failed because of his personal virtues- loyalty, faith, commitment, love, anger over injustice. On their own these virtues are to be desired but they are never enough and like Peter we need the **Holy Spirit** in our lives to do God's will... one step at a time. We love Peter because he is so like the way many of us would like to be but we love Jesus for his patience, his love and at this point his great sadness.

**Lent is a time for reflecting on the ways in which love and betrayal, glory and denial walk so closely together in the story of the cross.**

**1. As Dave warned us last week many of us are close to Judas in betraying Christ. There is a bit of Peter in us in our willingness to deny we ever knew Jesus. Please take a moment to contemplate ways in which you and I deny Christ.**

**2. The words used are very intimate - Why does Jesus use the term 'my children' talking to grown men?**

**3. You have been with Jesus for three years - how would you respond to his words in verse 33?**

**4 How is Jesus command the same /different to Leviticus ? what kind of love is He talking about?**

**5. Peter's declaration (13.37)- pride or sincerity? Explain your choice.**

**6. What does it mean to love as Jesus loves us?**

**7. How can we avoid denying Christ? Practical steps please.**

**Bill Herbert - Grundisburgh - March 2010**