**John 18:15-17** March 17, 2021

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Mid-week Lent #4

 *John 18:15Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard, 16but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in.*

 *17“You are not one of his disciples, are you?” the girl at the door asked Peter.*

 *He replied, “I am not.”*

**“You Are Not One of This Man’s Disciples, Are You?”**

Dear Friends in Christ,

 If you have ever known a moment of cowardice, of not acting when you wished you would have, you know it haunts you. It is like one of those dreams where you are trying to get off the railroad tracks as the locomotive blares and bears down on you, and you can only move in ultra-slow motion—that moment of failure will replay again and again. Once you finally shut off the auto-play on your unhappy memory, you probably *do* resolve that next time, should God give you that opportunity, it will be different. “I will do better next time!” you accidentally say out loud.

 “I will do better next time,” was probably going through the minds of Jesus’ two disciples in the beginning of our reading. You remember how it went. A couple hours earlier, Jesus had told Peter that he would deny him. Peter vehemently disagreed. He insisted that he *would* die for Jesus. When Peter upped the ante, Jesus saw his bid and raised it, *“I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!”*

 After that, they all retired to the Garden of Gethsemane and a couple hours later, the soldiers came. Peter tried to defend Jesus with a sword, but Jesus refused to go along. Next thing they knew, Jesus was ensuring their safe passage. They scattered like a school of fish when you reach your hand into the lake. Moments later, realizing they were not pursued, two disciples, Peter and John, regrouped and followed Jesus’ arresters to nearby Jerusalem.

 The detachment marched through half a mile of tight city streets, a city crowded with Passover observers. In the anonymity of the city, Peter and John drew close. Since John was somehow known to the high priest’s household—we’re not told how—he even slipped in the entrance at the same time as Jesus while Peter waited outside.

 So, here is a question. It is not the main question of this evening, but it is a question worth asking: “Should Peter have followed Jesus to the high priest’s house?” Some have suggested it was wrong. But consider his intentions. He wanted to be with Jesus. He surely felt keenly how he had deserted Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane—even if it had been at Jesus’ own permission.

 At any rate, Peter now stood outside the high priest’s house. Since Peter’s friend, John, was known in the high priest’s house—we are not told the connection—the servant girl doorkeeper honored John’s request to let Peter in. Peter entered. He had achieved his goal. He was close to his Savior. Perhaps he would soon be able to make amends for his cowardice.

 I wonder how it felt as he walked through that gate. Envision entering a courtyard closed in on all sides by an almost palatial stone house. All around were the minions of Jesus’ arch-enemies: all varieties of servants and armed guards. The walls and the faces were partially lit by an outdoor fire fighting off the chill of an early spring night. In the flickering orange light, Peter was searching where he could find his place in such a gathering of people hostile to his core beliefs.

 What did he feel?

 Maybe it was sudden fear. Maybe he had not realized what he was getting himself into when he followed the trail of Jesus’ arresters. And now that he was in their den, perhaps he was almost trembling.

 Or maybe he had all the cool self-confidence of the hero in one of those action movies. Perhaps Peter felt himself to be the one-man-army who somehow was going to secure Jesus’ freedom.

 But even before he could test his mettle with any battle-hardened soldier, the lowest of the high priest’s servants in that courtyard, the young servant girl whose job was to open and close the door, she made a little conversation, asked him an innocent question, and Peter was undone.

 She asked a question so simple and so simply answered, ***“You are not one of his disciples, are you?”*** She knew John. Apparently she knew John to be a follower of Jesus. She wondered if Peter were too. Her question was so disarming, “You aren’t, are you?” She didn’t expect him to say he was. Just wondering. ***“I am not.”*** Peter gave her the answer she was casually looking for. Peter barely realized what he had just done. Or if he did, he justified it the way we dress up our sins as mere faults – “Oh, that was so little; God wouldn’t really consider that a sin, would he? After all she’s just a servant girl. She doesn’t have the right to know. And if she knew, people would find out and then how could I help Jesus when he needs it.”

 It was so easy! And what did it matter? In fact, telling the truth would probably have been counterproductive!

 ***“You are not one of his disciples, are you?”***

 How will the question come to you? Will it be from people who have their suspicions about you. Will it be from people who use that question to beat you over the head with your own beliefs, beliefs about God or beliefs about human behavior?

 “Surely, you aren’t going to object to what I’m watching, to the way I talk, to my views on marriage or crime or anything else. ***You are not one of his disciples, are you?”*** “You’re not one of those guys who goes around calling things sin when they are nothing more than the way I was brought up, my personal preference. ***You are not one of his disciples, are you?”*** “This is the way people think these days. We’ve moved on since the 19th century. Even most Christians have. ***You are not one of his disciples, are you?”***

 In our moment of reflection, the past comes back to haunt us. I must tell you right now to tell those memories to get lost. Those have been forgiven. There were forgiven decades ago. Jesus paid those debts. The invoices marked paid are up there in God’s filing cabinet in heaven.

 But we also look forward to our future as people who treasure Jesus beloved sacrifice of his precious blood because of our sins. In our own minds we resolve to answer this question, “Yes, I am! I am one of his disciples!” May it be so!

 And yet, that is just what Simon Peter had been so certain he would say. What went wrong? The problem was that even though Peter and John had the right impulse to attend Jesus to the judgment hall, in one crucial way, at least Peter, had a major problem. His problem was the same problem he had had when Jesus told him he would desert him. The problem was pride and self-reliance.

 May our resolve to courageously answer the question, ***“You are not one of his disciples, are you?”*** be motivated out of our love for our Lord. But we must also realize the truth about ourselves. May we realize how dependent we and our love are on God’s blessing.

 Here I call your attention to two Bible passages, one from Romans 12:3: *“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”* Sober judgment is so important. I must realize that it is not *I* who has the courage to stand up to Satan’s attack. I must rely on another.

 With that sober judgment, we do not despair but we turn to God for help, and we implore other to pray for us. Listen to this passage of one Christian speaking to his fellow Christians: *“Pray… for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel… Pray that I may declare it fearlessly”* (Ephesians 6:19-20). Do you know who said that? Do you know who knew that it was so easy for him to turn coward? Do you know who wanted people to pray that he would declare the truth about his Savior fearlessly? It was the Apostle Paul. He who stood before kings and rioters and prison wardens and declared Jesus, even he asked others to pray for courage.

 When we stand in the circle of those who know not their Savior, nor want to hear from his friends, may God give us the courage and wisdom so we can bravely, graciously and clearly answer that seraching question, ***“You are not one of his disciples, are you?”*** O, Holy Spirit, give us the words. Amen.