

March 30, 2019

Luke 22:31-33 / John 18:15-18, 25-27

“The Rock”

Rev. Lou Nyiri

So, we are now back into John’s Gospel – we took a hiatus and now we are engaging once again as we move forward to the culmination of the Gospel writer’s intent in telling the story of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection & ascension.

You will recall the importance of the “hour” for John’s Jesus.

The Johannine story of Jesus’ death is the story of Jesus’ hour, toward which the whole Gospel has been moving.

Unlike the other Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) which refer to Jesus’ final moments as “Passion” referencing Jesus’ ‘suffering’ – John’s Jesus underscores his ‘hour’ as one of exaltation & glorification.

John’s Jesus goes to death willingly – not a suffering victim – rather he is the one in control.

Up to this point, John’s writer dramatically slowed the story narrative down so that chapters 13-17 served the purpose of allowing for Jesus to interpret his death to his disciples and the readers before his death took place.

Like hitting pause during playing-back to recap what has transpired up to that point so that one better grasps the importance and significance of a movie’s ending scenes.

The pace of play picks up in Chapters 18-19 with action unfolding rapidly, moving us quickly toward Jesus’ death and burial.

Once the hour is underway – there is no narrative pause for explanation.

Like flying, the seats and trays must be returned to an upright position because we’re ready to take off.

Chapters 18-19 break into five discrete units – each shifting Jesus’ location – moving from arrest to burial:

Unit 1 – John 18:1-12 – the arrest

Unit 2 – John 18:13-27 – interrogation by Annas

Unit 3 – 18:28 to 19:16a – trial before Pilate

Unit 4 – 19:16b-37 – crucifixion and death

Unit 5 – 19:38-42 – burial

As we noted previously, John usually runs 2 parallel tracks – there is the story line and what that story line actually means in the bigger picture – what we note in chapters 18-19 is how the Gospel writer employs painful irony showing that it is “the world” – not Jesus – who is on trial.

We also, get a chance to see in our text from John this morning the light and dark imagery which makes up some of the subtle nuances of John’s gospel.

Good things happen in the light – out in the open – without shadows.

Not so Good things happen at night – under the cover of darkness – in the shadows – away from direct light – for the fourth evangelist “night” is used metaphorically to describe separation from God’s presence.

When reading this 4<sup>th</sup> gospel, one’s ears (or eyes) should perk up when you come to light and dark images.

We’ve seen a few thus far – in the prologue, John 1:5, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

John, the Baptizer, described Jesus in John 1:9, as, “The true light, which enlightens everyone, [who] was coming into the world.”

Nicodemus visits Jesus, “...by night...” (John 3:2). During that conversation, the fourth evangelist writes, “And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. (*For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.*) But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.” [John 3:19-21]

The light/dark imagery will change the way you read this gospel as well – they have helped me see the subtleties of grace which abound – now today, we see this light-night/dark shadowy contrast surrounding Jesus and Peter during these crucifixion & resurrection passages.

Standing around a charcoal fire – one with some light & some dark shadows – one which can illuminate if one is right on it though still shadowy enough when standing away from it that one’s reflection can be hid – it is around just such a fire that Peter confesses to not knowing Jesus – hears the rooster crow and according to our Lucan passage recalls Jesus’ words to him before the denial.

I’m guessing that shortly afterward a wave of regret, remorse washed over Peter – though I’m guessing at some point Peter also encountered reconciliation, based on how Peter moved forward as point person in the dissemination of the Gospel after Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension – I’m guessing he recalled the gift of grace offered before he knew he needed it.

Morrie Schwartz, sociology professor and subject of the book Tuesdays With Morrie by Mitch Albom chose to share his evolving knowledge of living while dying through his book “Letting Go: Reflections on Living While Dying” – in it he writes,

As we get older, we have lots of regrets. We get stuck in the past and it is such a waste of time. Look at the past and ask, ‘What can I learn? What did I learn? How does it help me?’”

The past – is the great definer of who we are today – however it does not determine who we can become when surrounded by and transformed by God’s grace.

God's grace is such that, God says,

Accept me, I love you. Reject me, I love you. Embrace me or turn from me, I love you. I know that one day you will turn and run from me; one day you will reject me. I want you to know, I've already prepared the way back for you.

To prove it – God did the extraordinary – God stepped down from heaven and took on human flesh – our minds ask, “What in the world are you doing God?” – however, the better question might be, “God, what are you doing in the world?”

The simple answer – extending grace to a guilt-riddled world...and in so doing changing the world one person at a time.

Grace, then, creates the personal space and atmosphere which opens us up to reconciling acts.

Grace precedes confession – however, grace also begins with confession.

Think about it like this – a young kid gets a splinter and goes to their parent to get the splinter out.

The parent goes to the bathroom and gets the tweezers, mercurochrome (that's what my folks used – it smelled awful; it stung worse) and a band aid.

The child doesn't like this one bit and declares, “No...I just want the band aid.”

Sometimes we are that child.

We come to God with our sin, but all we want is the covering.

We want to skip the antiseptic work of cleaning the wound and the healing that makes re-infection less likely.

We think that if we hide our sin – perhaps God will still heal what we conceal.

Confession, however, isn't telling God what we did – God already knows.

Confession is agreeing with God that our actions or inactions were wrong – then it involves doing what we can about it.

Consider these words from Morrie Schwartz,

“Forgiveness means apologizing and making amends if we can. There are some places or circumstances where nothing more can be done. When you can't mend fences with others, tell yourself, ‘Yes, I did it and it would have been better if I hadn't, but now I want to forgive myself for having done that negative deed.’”

What about Peter – The Rock – did Peter confess? Did Peter deal with his past?

I believe he did, here's how it goes in Luke 22 after the third denial:

<sup>60</sup> 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.

Each tear a confession; each sob an admission...

Later in John's Gospel there will be another encounter between Jesus and Peter around another charcoal fire at the breakfast fish fry where the two will have a face-to-face and heart-to-heart life-changing conversation...but, alas, I get ahead of the story.

Suffice to say, I like Peter, and you should too.

He's the Rock upon which Jesus founds the church – and he didn't get it right all the time.

He did, however, teach us something vitally important, between his denial and discovery came two experiences: Tears of remorse and the cross event.

Had Peter only shed tears and not seen the cross he would have known only despair.  
Had Peter seen the cross and shed no tears he would have known only arrogance.  
Having seen both, Peter knew redemption.

Mix the tears of the sinner with the cross of a Savior and one gets a joyful escort out of guilt's canyon.

Lent is our journey through the "valley of the shadow of death" as Psalm 23 puts it.  
Lent is our journey through the pain & torment as well as the exaltation and glorification of God's salvation plan.  
Lent is when we recall Jesus' words to Peter are words to us as well, "I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your [brothers and sisters]."  
Lent is when we look into the Savior's eyes and see grace upon grace.  
Lent is when we encounter anew God's grace and allow that grace to redeem, transform, lead and restore us into right relationship with each other and God.

Lent is our journey to the cross & beyond.

Amen and Amen!