

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,
who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age,
according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

The portion of our Savior's Passion we focus on tonight: John 18

1 When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it.

2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. **3** So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

5 "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

"I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) **6** When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

7 Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?"

And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

8 "I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." **9** This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."

10 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)

11 Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

12 Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him **13** and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. **14** Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people.

15 Simon 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, **16** but 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."

18 It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

25 As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?"

He denied it, saying, "I am not."

26 One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" **27** Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

Tonight we watch as *Jesus of Nazareth Passes By* - crossing Kidron Valley into the Garden of Gethsemane. He frequently went there with his disciple. Normally it was a **pleasant garden** - but tonight it was no garden spot. It was a **battlefield**. Here Jesus wrestles with the realities he is about to face - who would want to do this?! It was Jesus' greatest temptation - the temptation to

avoid his suffering and death. The battle was real but Jesus consistently conquered - always wanting to do the will of the Father - triumphantly saying, ***Not my will, but yours be done!***

There were other battles raging in this garden that night. There is the final battle to reclaim the heart and soul of Judas. Jesus mounts a perfect offensive of Law and Gospel designed to break through the lies and deceptions that ensnared Judas, then liberate him with Jesus' forgiving love.

Here Peter faced a battle. Jumping into battle with his sword drawn to keep his foolish willful vow to Jesus: ***Even if I should die with you, yet I will not forsake you.*** Only to find he chose the wrong battle. He actually was interfering with the Father's will. Later Peter's battlefield shifted to warming fire in the courtyard of the enemy - a battle he loses.

There is **much to learn from these battles for our battles** as follower of Christ. The enemies are the same. So are their tactics. Whether we realize it or not - we live on this battlefield. This is a **key facet of the Lenten Season**: to remind us that we are called to daily **Face the Enemy** - to know the enemy and to learn to use the weapons our Lord provides to **Face the Enemy** and triumph - daily even to the end. Tonight we learn not to **Face the Enemy** as Judas and Peter did, but as our full flesh and blood brother - our Lord Jesus did.

As Jesus enemies approach to arrest him, Jesus makes it clear who is really in charge here. There mob and weapons were worthless in the face of his words. He says ***I am he***, and they fell helpless to the ground. Jesus speaks with nothing less than the powerful word of God.

Further more listen to what Jesus says, ***8 I told you that I am he. If*** (or better) ***Since you are looking for me, then let these men go.*** Notice this is **not** a weak last request of a condemned man, *I beg you - let them go.* This is a **command** from the Lord himself. They have no choice! Jesus was surrounded by his enemies - like Daniel was surrounded by lions in the den. But Jesus was equally safe. Not just because he is the Son of God. But because he entrusted himself into the caring hands of God the Father. As we read in Hebrews 5: ***7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.***

Jesus faced the enemies with boldness - with **confidence in God** - trusting God - trusting his will to be good and love to be perfect. Jesus allowed himself to be seized, abused, crucified and killed - knowing that **in God he would win the battle.**

We who are his current day disciples learn boldness for battle, confidence in God, not ourselves.

Even as our enemies come to torment us - Jesus demands: ***Let***

these. . .go!

When we are attacked by our conscience for sins of the past - sins fresh on our mind - our sinful foolishness - Jesus tells our conscience: ***Let. . .go!*** I washed away that sin with my blood & covered it with my robe of righteousness. Peace replaces condemnation here!

When **Satan** seeks to claim us, accuse us, or tempt us away, Jesus steps forward boldly demanding: ***Let these. . .go!*** I bought them with my blood. They belong to me!

When the **grim reaper - death** comes to terrorize us, Jesus decrees: ***Let these. . .go!*** They were attached to me in the waters of baptism. Buried with me and raised to new life - your grave has lost all power over them. Standing in Christ - with Christ - He stands with us. This is the basis of our bold confidence. It is critical that we stand with him. That's the only way to **Face the Enemy** and win. The only way not to fall to the Enemy and join their ranks as an enemy of Jesus, just like Judas.

One of the saddest sentences in Scriptures is right here in John 18: ***And Judas the traitor was standing there with them. Standing there with the enemies*** of Jesus - with those who detested the kind of Messiah the Lord sent them.

Judas was not the last of Jesus followers who had tasted his gift of the forgiveness of sin - the new life of righteousness and freedom and the security of know God is my Savior - only to abandon it out of a greater love for sin's ways. As Paul wrote Timothy: ***Demas has forsaken me, having loved the present world.***

We've seen it in our church family - if not our own families - maybe even our own life. Children raised in the faith - adults coming to the faith - all filled with joy on their Confirmation Day - glad to stand with Jesus - only in time to lose their focus and joy - neglecting prayer and worship - no longer longing to listen to God's Word or eager to meet Jesus in the Lord's Supper. People who have no interest in promoting the coming of God's kingdom with their conversations, care, and contributions. They may even think they are Christians because they took those classes and were confirmed - but Jesus warns:

Whoever is not with me, is against me. Just like Judas. As **Jesus of Nazareth Passes By** - who will leave the enemies and stand again with Jesus? Tonight Jesus wages the battle to reclaim the strays. Will we help?

What about us? Who of us hasn't got lost in the activities of the Enemy - rather than **Facing The Enemy**. ***Jesus passes by*** to call us to **use Lent** to make **charges** in our **life** and **mind set** - to **develop the habit** of daily **devotions, faithful gathering** around Word and Sacrament. For some this is working on **frequency**. For those who are faithful in attendance - it's a call to grow in making the most of our engagement in worship for ourselves and to serve one another. None of us is ever so good at using these weapons that we have nothing new to learn.

Three year of training for Peter were tested on this battlefield. Fresh from a Passover Feast with Jesus that was both exhilarating and sobering, Peter showed he had much more to learn about how to **Face The Enemy**. Peter boldly marched into the Enemies territory - putting his **confidence in himself** - standing with the enemy around their fire. It was only a matter of time before he **denied** even knowing Jesus **with the same boldness**. His **pledge to stand with** Jesus to death switched to a **false oath disowning** his Savior in order that Peter might save himself.

Was Peter lost? Not yet! Instead he was rescued from the brink - by a look. But not just any look. By the **purposeful look** as *Jesus of Nazareth Passed By*. It was the look - *I know what you did. Just what I warned you that you were about to do - deny me 3 times before the rooster crowed*. But Jesus' look was **not mainly one of scorn** - not, *It told you...* It was the **look of love** that reconnected with Peter - Lord & servant - Dear friends. It brought Peter back to what he knew and believed. *Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. To whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life?* He witnessed Jesus **healing** the sick, **raising** the dead, and **displaying his glory** from **stormy seas** to the **Mt. of Transfiguration**. Peter **repented** of trying to be **his own savior** - standing **too close to the enemies** - **failing to listen** to Jesus. His tears where the **tears of faith**, **turning from his foolish ways** to trusting in Jesus' forgiving love - trusting God to be his Savior.

What **useful instruction!** Whether you are one who boldly rushes into battle thinking too highly of yourself or you get the *deer in the headlights look* every time you are called to stand on Jesus - either in the face of a crowd choosing sin - or with an opportunity to tell someone about Jesus - either case - look at Jesus' loving look.

It's a look that calls you to **Face The Enemy!** Your self-reliance. Your service to your Master Fear of embarrassing yourself, something you avoid at all costs. **Face the Enemies** with Jesus - to see sin and meet it with Jesus. This will not happen after this one sermon. It will not happen thinking about it or just reading about Peter. It happens by **Facing The Enemy** of your fears with Jesus. **Identifying** your sinful ideas and mindset. **Standing with Jesus** and **practicing** for battle. Fill your head and your mouth with Scripture. Work it down into you heart to mold your will. Let it fill you mind so you see reality - revealed by God. The practice using the Word - learning the skills or rightly applying the sharp double edged sword of the Word of Truth to encourage yourself and others.

So what are you - no we - going to do? Merely know that we need to **Face The Enemy?** No! It is time to recommit ourselves to use this Lent as 6 weeks of **training to Face the Enemy** including our **failures, fears and foolishness**. To discover that **the only safe place to stand** in the battlefield is to **actively**

stand with Jesus. The we will be equipped to **Face The Enemy** and win in Jesus. Amen.