

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

John 18:12-27
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
March 4, 2018

ADULT MESSAGE

They arrested and condemned Jesus to death during a secret, late-night trial held at the home of the Jewish high priest. Earlier that night, Maundy Thursday, Jesus had gathered his disciples in an upper room to celebrate the ancient Passover. They were remembering the night when, hundreds of years before, God rescued the Israelites from **slavery in Egypt**. Now, on this night, **Jesus took on the role of a slave**, washed his followers' feet and served them a meal of bread and wine. During the meal, Jesus told his beloved friends one would sell him out, one would deny him three times and the others would all run away and hide. Then he said, **"This is my body given for you. This is my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins."** They would fail Jesus, but Jesus wouldn't fail them.

Jesus had spent three years teaching and equipping this motley crew of disciples to be the start of his new mission on Planet Earth. They had seen the miracles, heard the parables and experienced his loving, forgiving, renewing spirit repeatedly. They all promised that to stick with Jesus, even to the death. But, they didn't. Jesus knew this and still shared his precious meal with them.

Remember Peter. He tried hard to trust and follow Jesus, but nobody is perfect.

- He is the fisherman who tried **walking on water** with Jesus. He stood on the water all right, but when he took his eyes off Jesus, blub, blub, down he went.

- Peter is the one who wanted to **shelters** for Moses, Elijah and Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Everything was so glorious and beautiful that Peter wanted to stay there on the **peaceful mountain**. Jesus said, no, there is work yet to be done in the **troubled valley** below.

- Peter is the first one who **realized and proclaimed that Jesus was** the **"Messiah, the Son of God."** But, when Jesus told Peter that Jesus was going to die for the salvation of the world, Peter tried to stop him. That's when Jesus said, **"Get behind me Satan for you are focusing on things of men and not of God."**

-When Jesus announced that he was returning to Jerusalem, Peter said, **"Well, let us also go and die with him."** Peter had the best of intentions.

- Peter is the one who **tried to defend Jesus** during his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. He drew his sword and cut off the temple servant's ear. Jesus told him to put away the sword – "**He who lives by the sword dies by the sword.**"

- Now, Peter gets his **chance to stand up for Jesus once more**. There in the courtyard of the high priest's house, Peter proceeds to, **three times, deny even knowing Jesus**. Then Peter, mortified, **runs off and hides** with the other disciples.

- When Jesus rose from the dead on Easter and appeared to the women, Peter and the others, still hiding behind locked doors, **refused to believe** it. . .

If the salvation of the world was dependent upon Peter and those first disciples, God help us! And what about if you'd been there on the night of Jesus' death – surrounded by angry authorities, jeering crowd and soldiers with swords, would you have **admitted to being a follower of Jesus?** And how are we at following Jesus in our own world? When we see injustice? Abuse? Slaughtered school children? Hatred? Poverty? Addiction? Neglect? **Do we respond as Jesus would?** I confess, I'm **not too brave**. I **don't always speak up** when I should. I'm sure Jesus grieves my **too often selfish, judgmental, sinful thoughts**.

If the **present moment** depends on me – God help us! If the **future** depends on you and me – God help us! If the **salvation of the world** depends on what we are doing here at First Lutheran – God help us!

The high priest said, "**It is better for one man to die for the people.** . . ." He was probably trying to prevent a rebellion, which the Romans could easily crush. However, his words actually paint a clear picture of **God's plan for our salvation. One man dying for the people**, for me, for you, for all of us. . . **Jesus**.

While beloved disciples betrayed, denied, ran and hid, **Jesus stood resolutely** in the **face of evil and hatred**:

- As the leaders of his own religion found him guilty of blaspheming God,
- As whips tore through the flesh of his body,
- As shouts of "Crucify! Crucify!" rang out,
- As spikes were being driven into his wrists and ankles,
- As the very people he came to save taunted,
- As Roman soldiers cursed,

- As his own mother wept at his feet,
- And as his death approached.

Jesus still stood resolutely in our defense, for our salvation, to give us life and hope. God help us.

If the salvation of the world was up to Peter and the other eleven disciples, God help us. If winning World War II was up to the U.S. joining the fight, God help us. If the end of the tuberculosis/polio epidemics were up to our scientists, God help us. If the cure for cancer is up to us providing free college education, God help us. If conquering our opioid drug epidemic is up to our legislature, God help us.

If everything depended on me, on us – God help us. **Whom are you going to bet on, Peter or Jesus?** It was not looking good for Peter, our world or me. **However, once God does God’s work** in “**cowardly Peter,**” in cowardly me, in you, in our faith family here at First and in our world – **amazing good can follow in and through each and all of us.** Peter went on to help start the early Christian church, which made it possible for us to be followers of Jesus here today. World War II, Tuberculosis, Polio, Cancer, Addictions – God has helped and is helping humanity in all of these. I have a personal example of how God can help turn evil things around. Somehow, **Tuberculosis, dreaded killer** during my parents’ young lives is now being used to battle **cancer,** the **dreaded killer** that has attacked my own bladder.

If the salvation of the world depends on what we are doing here at First Lutheran – **God help us! And therein lies our hope – God help us! And therein lies our hope – God help us! God help us. God has and God will help us.** Hanging on a cross. Rising from a tomb. Confronting sin, evil and death in our world. God help us. That’s **exactly what Jesus had in mind that day.** And that’s **exactly what Jesus is doing here in our personal lives and world to this very day.**

Mass shootings around our country. **Hunger and homelessness** in our own community. **Suicide** rates rising. Plenty of folks who have **never tasted the love of God.** All of these scourges and more **cry out for us to act. God calls us to act. And God will help us.** That is **God’s promise** and **our hope.** **God help us.** That’s where I’m going to place my hope. **Jesus.** Thanks be to God. Amen.

