

John 18:4-27

⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" ⁵ They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth."^[a] Jesus replied, "I am he."^[b] Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus^[c] said to them, "I am he,"^[d] they stepped back and fell to the ground. ⁷ Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."^[e] ⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he.^[f] So if you are looking for me, let these men go." ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." ¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. ¹¹ Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" ¹² So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they took him 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 was better to have one person die for the people.¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." ¹⁸ Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself. ¹⁹ Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." ²² When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" ²³ Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" ²⁴ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. ²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." ²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

“Are You His Disciple?”
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My mom’s farm had chickens. Busy little ladies cavorting around the yard, scratching, pecking, and clucking. They provided an endless supply of eggs, and an endless supply of entertainment. But they weren’t particularly bright. They were inclined to wander off into dangerous territory or get themselves separated from the safety of the group. And there was an endless supply of likely predators from which they needed protection. Their protector was the rooster. None had more personality than the rooster: proud protector of the yard and of his flock; chest puffed up, strutting around the yard like a miniature dictator; crowing defiance at anyone who challenged his authority; boldly proclaiming the coming of the light each morning.

I suspect Peter was a little bit like that rooster. He was inclined toward grand proclamations and bold gestures: jumping out of the boat to walk on the water with Jesus; refusing to allow Jesus to wash his feet and then demanding that Jesus wash not only his feet, but his whole body; proclaiming with absolute certainty that he would follow Jesus even to death.

And death has come for Jesus – the soldiers are there to arrest him. And there is proud Peter beside Jesus in the garden, chest puffed out, sword drawn, ready to defend his Lord to the death.

But Jesus wasn’t really one for puffed up chests, prideful boasts, or swords. His was the way of peace, compassion, and sacrifice. Peter could boast all he wanted to, but talk, after all, is just talk. It’s the walk that matters. And Jesus, compelled by love, was ready to walk the path to Calvary.

Peter knew (or thought he knew) how to serve his living Lord. He didn’t know how to serve the Jesus who was willing to die. Peter knew how to be the disciple willing to draw a sword to ignite a revolution. He didn’t know how to be the kind of disciple that turned the other cheek.

For all his bluster, all his bravado, all his proud declarations of loyalty, Peter found himself confused. Confused and on trial, so to speak. While Jesus was on trial, questioned by the high priest, Peter was facing his own interrogation.

"You're not one of his disciples, are you?"

"I am not."

I suspect this was less a denial of Jesus, and more a denial of himself. I can imagine the kind of internal dialogue Peter was probably having with himself in the space between the question and his reply.

If being a disciple of Jesus means turning the other cheek, I just can't do it, Lord.

If being a disciple of Jesus means thinking before I speak, I just can't do it Lord.

If being a disciple of Jesus means laying down my sword, I just can't do it Lord.

Peter, brash, boastful Peter...

Standing in that courtyard in the dark...

Was confronted by an awareness of himself and how unlike Jesus he was.

Jesus was love, and mercy and grace.

Peter was...

What was Peter?

"You're not one of his disciples, are you?"

"I am not."

Stand with Peter in the courtyard for a moment. Imagine it is you who just realized you weren't the person Jesus was calling you to be.


Are you, like Peter boastful and proud, prone to think before you speak?

Are you quick to judge?

More concerned with retribution than Grace?

Unwilling to lay down your sword?

Or your regret?



Or your resentment?

Or your grief?

Or your need to be right?

Confronted with our own flaws and failings - and we all have them - we might judge ourselves, like Peter, unworthy of our Lord and Savior's grace and mercy, unworthy of calling ourselves followers of Christ, unable to accept that Jesus is calling us to be transformed.

On another day, in another place, the risen Lord will give Peter another chance.

"Do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord, I love you.

"Then feed my sheep."

Three times Jesus will ask, once for each time that Peter denies being his disciple.

"Do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord, I love you."

"Then feed my sheep."

And he will. Peter will feed the sheep, love and serve the people of Christ as the early church begins to take shape. Asked again, in a thousand different ways, "Are you his disciple?"

Peter will answer a resounding "yes."

How about us? When we find ourselves challenged what will our answer be?

If being a disciple of Jesus means choosing mercy over retribution, will you be his disciple?

If being a disciple of Jesus means thinking before you speak, and choosing words of kindness and compassion when you do, will you be his disciple?

If being a disciple of Jesus means choosing a life of peace instead of the way of the sword, will you be his disciple?

Its not so easy is it. I've managed to get it wrong a dozen times already today, and its not even noon yet. How about you?

But listen, the cock is crowing, announcing the dawning of a new day. His chest is puffed up and he is making his bold declaration. It is not a declaration of your condemnation, but an invitation to step into the light and try again. Love always gives us the opportunity to try again. And Jesus is love. May the same be said of us.

Amen.