

When Everything Went ~~Wrong~~. Right!



Viewing Holy Week Through the Eyes of Peter

“When Failure Claims Us”

Luke 22:54-62

Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed.

The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Special Music:

“My Jesus”

Anne Wilson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FW5o2uBeMWQ>

Luke 22:54-62

54 Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance.

55 And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them.

56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “This man was with him.”

57 But he denied it. “Woman, I don’t know him,” he said.

58 A little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.”

“Man, I am not!” Peter replied.

59 About an hour later another asserted, “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.”

60 Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed.

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AN UNEXPECTED RESPONSE

Jason was the only child of a cantaloupe farmer, James (Dancer) Williams. At fifteen years of age, he had a brushy head of dark hair, permanent grin plastered on his face, and muscles that would normally be found only on a child four to five years older than he was. It was just him and his dad working to keep the farm going during times that were mostly hard in the heat of Parable, Texas. His mother had passed away from pneumonia when he was eight, but he still remembered her sparkling smile and loving arms. Life just hadn't been the same since she was gone. Each year, he and his dad struggled to bring in enough crops to make it through one more year.

Jason attended classes at Jesse L. Porter High School in Parable. His days consisted of morning chores before school, then classes followed by after school chores and nights studying. Except on those nights where he and his dad had to sit up with a sick animal or had a calf to deliver. Saturdays were relegated to farmwork with rest on Sunday after church. Unless it was harvest time, when all of his attention was given to bringing in the cantaloupe crops.

James Dancer Williams (Dancer because he had been known to cut a fine rug in his younger days), took his responsibilities seriously. He had lost most of the joy in his life when his wife passed but remained loyal to raising his son. Helen would have wanted it that way. At times he felt he was too stern with the boy, but it took both of them working hard to keep the farm afloat. There just wasn't a lot of time for anything else. He kept God in his heart and did his best to

help his son remember the importance of their faith. So, he insisted that Sundays were set aside for church and rest.

This year had been a good one, with surplus crops. Dancer didn't want the extra cantaloupe to go to waste so he decided to give the Farmer's Market a whirl and see if they could make a little extra cash. That shouldn't be too difficult. The market was only open on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays of each month. He had missed the deadline for turning in his fees for the 2nd Saturday but managed to scrape up enough cash to secure a spot on the 4th Saturday. They would load up the truck on Friday night so they could be at the market early the next morning.

But on Thursday, the tractor had sputtered and died. He knew he had no choice to but make time to fix it, so he was having to go to town on Friday to Sam's junk yard and see if he could salvage a fuel pump from one of the many dead tractors on the lot. He knew it might take him all day to find the right one, even if Sam was available to help him look. School was out for teacher training, so Jason would be at home.

Looking up from his eggs and toast at breakfast, he spoke to his son. "Jason, I have to run into town and try to scrounge up a fuel pump for the tractor. I know that I told you that we would load the truck together, but this is something that has to be done. I need you to take care of getting the truck loaded while I am gone."

"When will you get back?" Jason asked.

“It may take me all day, Jason. It depends on how quickly I can find a pump in decent condition that will fit. I will get back as soon as I can.”

“Gee, dad. Since there wasn’t any school and I’m caught up on the chores, I was going to hang out with some of the guys at school.”

“Son, you know this is more important. If you get the truck loaded early, then you will still have plenty of time to meet up with your friends.”

“Well, okay dad. You can count on me. I will get it done.”

“I appreciate it, son. I will see you when I get back.”

“Alright, dad. Good luck with your search.”

With that, Dancer left the house, put his tools into the car, and headed for Sam’s. Maybe he would get lucky and find the pump quickly.

Right after his dad left, the phone rang. It was Jason’s friend Bruce from school. “Jason, the T & P train is coming through the junction at 10 this morning. And guess what? It’s loaded with all kinds of military equipment. You know, tanks, trucks, a helicopter, and even a couple of missiles from what I hear. You gotta come see. Jeff and Myron are going to meet us at the old depot.”

“I can’t, Bruce. I promised my dad I would load the truck for the farmer’s market tomorrow. I’m going to have to pass this time.”

“But Jason, there may not be a next time. This is going to be epic!”

“Oh, I wish I could, Bruce. But there is just no way.”

“Look, Jason, if you come and join us, then Myron, Jeff, and I will come help you load the truck afterwards.”

“Well, that sounds like it just might work. Yeah, sure. I’ll see you at the depot as soon as I can get there.”

“Great Jason! I’m glad you see it my way. Man, this is going to be something else!”

With that, Jason hung up the phone, grabbed his jacket, hopped on his bike, and headed for the depot where he met up with his friends. Although they were excited and filled with anticipation, the train was over two hours late. When it finally reached Parable, there were over sixty cars in the train filled with all kinds of military equipment. Because the train crossed several major intersections, it had to crawl slowly through Parable. There was even a point where the train had to come to a dead stop so tracks could be switched. Since it had already stopped the engineers decided it would be a good time to inspect the couplings and freight tie downs. By the time the train had moved on passed the depot, it had been over five hours.

This had been the most exciting day for the boys as they watched the train until it was out of sight. They decided to grab a hamburger at the local diner and regale themselves with everything they had witnessed. Finishing up his burger, Jason looked out the diner window only to realize that it was getting dark.

“Guys, we have to get that truck loaded for my dad. It’s getting late.”

“What are you talking about?” said Myron and Jeff together.

“Bruce promised me that if I joined you today, all of you would help me get the truck loaded with cantaloupe for the Farmer’s Market tomorrow.”

“Gee, Jason, it’s late and I have to get home,” said Jeff

“My mom will kill me if I don’t my chores done,” said Myron.

Bruce sheepishly spoke up, “I know I promised we would help you, Jason. But it’s just too late. We just can’t help tonight.”

“But guys, you promised. And I really need the help.”

“We’ll have to help some other time, Jason. We just can’t do it tonight.”

Jason looked into each of their faces and realized that he was on his own. He never should have let Bruce talk him into going to see the train. His dad was going to kill him.

He stood up and ran back to the depot to grab his bike and head home. He didn’t know if he should ride fast to try and make things right with his dad, or ride slow knowing what he was facing when he arrived home. It wasn’t like him to break his promises to his dad and the guilt was overwhelming. His dad had always been there for him and now Jason was letting him down. As he pulled up into the driveway, he could see the truck sitting outside of the garage under the light. When he got closer, he could see that it was piled high with cantaloupe. Jason knew what had happened and was sick to his stomach.

Entering the front door, he found his dad sitting in his recliner watching a little TV before bed. “I kept your supper warm, son. It’s in the oven.” Of course

he had made supper as well. He didn't know that Jason was going to grab a hamburger with his friends.

"Dad... I," Jason started.

His dad turned off the television, stood up, and came toward him. Dancer must have seen the guilt and shame in his son's eyes. The eye contact made Jason even more sick as he held back the tears, knowing how much he must have hurt his father. Dancer didn't ask for a reason. He didn't ask for an explanation. He simply put his arms around his son and said, "I love you, son. I forgive you. Now, eat your dinner and get some rest, we have to leave early in the morning." He kissed the top of Jason's head and went quietly to his room.

Jason knew he couldn't eat so he put his supper in the fridge for later. Then he went to his room thinking about his father's reaction which just seemed to make him feel even more guilty. He almost wished his dad had punished him, made him pay for his error in judgement and his lack of responsibility. He switched off the light, lay back in bed, and quietly wept thinking about how much His dad must love him.

It isn't the act or the realization of our selfishness that causes us to melt at times like these. It's the reaction of the people that we have failed. It's the look in the eyes of the people that we have done a disservice to. It's not the pain of own conscience that we struggle with, but the realization of the pain that we have inflicted on others by letting them down. We can deal with our own conscience. We can take steps to fix the flaws in our character. What we cannot do is fix the wounds that we have perpetrated on the people that we love and care for.

The younger we are, the more difficult it is for us to understand just what all that means. It takes age, wisdom, and experience to understand the pain that we inflict on others. In some ways, it's like a mirror. When we look in their eyes, we see the pain that others have caused us which allows us to embrace empathy with regards to their hurt.

As we grow older, we often gird ourselves with armor and a lack of empathy due to the many times that others have hurt us. We can keep others at a distance, and not allow them to get close in order to protect ourselves. And we can feel that this is justified, a matter of survival in a world where people often feel no obligation towards us and the promises that they have made to us. What we have to be sure of is that we don't become so calloused that such behavior no longer bothers us.

61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times."

62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Jesus doesn't call out to Peter. All he does look straight at Peter and Peter looks back into his eyes. They don't need to speak to each other. Jesus can see the guilt, the remorse, the anguish in Peter's eyes. And Peter can see the love, grace, and forgiveness in the eyes of Jesus. Nothing needs to be said. And as Jesus takes up his cross, beaten and bloodied as he stumbles his way to Calvary, Peter is left to deal with pangs of regret that are burning a hole through his heart.

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Never in the history of the world has there been a more poignant moment for us to reflect on our own failures as this one, where we can see our own sin compounded and heavy as Christ forgives us and pushes toward the cross to redeem us. Forgiveness when no forgiveness is justified. Grace when there is no room for grace. Mercy from whom no mercy was shown.

Jesus has experienced this kind of heaviness, this burden that is a reflection found in the eyes of others when they feel that they have been let down. When Jesus delays his travel to Bethany, knowing how ill Lazarus was and how concerned Mary and Martha are, he knows what he will find when he arrives there.

32 Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

34 And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”

35 Jesus wept.

JESUS WEPT!

We find ourselves asking “why is Jesus weeping?” when he knows that he is about to raise Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus has been dead for four days and Jesus is about to perform one of the most important miracles of his ministry. Why is he sad? Why does he weep?

He weeps because he knows how much faith Mary and Martha had in him and they believe that he has let them down.

“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

This moment between Jesus and Mary is not about the death of Lazarus. It is about the anguish that Mary feels, knowing that Jesus could have saved her brother if he had only come sooner. As Jesus looks into her eyes, although there is still a magnificent amount of love between them, he sees that Mary holds him responsible for the death of her brother. And he weeps, not at her anger or her

frustration, but at her pain, feeling that the one person she could count on had failed her. He weeps at her anguish. He knows that everything is going to be alright, but right here, in this moment, staring into each other's eyes, there is a pain that so many of us have felt at some time or another. Jesus doesn't feel guilt because he knows that all of what has happened is part of a larger purpose. But his empathy for Mary in her anguish is paramount at that moment.

So it is, when Jesus looks at Peter and Peter looks back. Jesus sees the guilt, pain, frustration, and remorse in Peter's eyes knowing that he has let Jesus down, even after Jesus had told him that it would happen. And Peter sees... not anger, or condemnation as expected, but instead he sees Love... Grace... Compassion... and Forgiveness. And this sends daggers of fire through his heart, as he leaves Jesus to his fate and goes off to deal with his own pain and weeps bitterly.

We see the same kind of engagement with Jason and his father in our story today. Jason knows that he let his father down. His guilt is overwhelming. Yet, when he looks into his father's eyes, he sees Love... Grace... Compassion... Forgiveness. Not at all what he was expecting.

How often we are given to anger when people let us down. And we feel justified by that response. But I tell you, that is not the response of Jesus, and we are ultimately called to be like him. Even when those that love us the most, hurt us so badly. It always hurts more when that pain is caused by someone that we love. That is because we have allowed them to bypass our defenses and we are left vulnerable to their neglect and irresponsibility.

But here is something to note. Write it down. Burn it into your hearts and minds. Carve it in stone. Jesus never, ever lets us down, even when we think he does. He sees our misplaced anguish just as he saw Mary's misplaced anguish. He came to change the world by teaching us that we should live our lives the way that he lived his. And when we, with our calloused and wounded faith, and our heart devoid of hope, look into his eyes expecting him to apologize to us, or punish us for our transgressions, what we actually find is... Love... Grace... Compassion... Forgiveness. Jesus weeps with us. He understands that we don't understand the things of heaven, the nature of God, and have barely touched on the wonders of Creation. And in his glory, he came to die on the cross and weep for us and with us, even as we stare back in confusion, despair, guilt, and blame.

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

“Father, they don't understand. Please don't hold their ignorance against them. I die willingly so that they might live!”

We are stepping into Holy Week. Today, is Palm Sunday when we celebrate Jesus' triumphant arrival into Jerusalem. A time when so many proclaimed him to be king, not understanding the kind of king that he would be. And because they did not understand, by the end of they week, when they bowed to false accusations and witnesses, seeing that he was not the king they were expecting, they would turn on him and demand his death.

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“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

I challenge us all to stare into the eyes of Jesus this week and see the way that he is responding to our treachery, our disobedience, our character flaws, our moral failures. If you return his gaze, you will not find condemnation, anger, or prejudice. You will only see... Love... Grace... Mercy... Compassion... and Forgiveness.

God bless you all,

Amen

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