



John 18:25–27

25 Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, ‘You aren’t one of his disciples too, 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 garden?’ 27 Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a cock began to crow.

Reflection

(Today's reflection is given by Craig Tubman).

There is a powerful interplay in chapter 18 of John's Gospel. The calmness of the upper room is now a distant memory and John is taking us back and forth between Jesus' trial and Peter in the outer court. Whatever chaos and betrayal may pursue, the final verse noting the rooster crowing indicates one key truth. Even in the chaos, Jesus is in control.

This truth is most important because we see Peter's confusion about what is happening tumble over into outright despair. Maybe you've experienced this? A faith experience moving from confusion to de-

spair? Of course that's not what the movement of a faith experience is meant to be like right? People like myself – church ministers – say that faith brings contentment, joy, and direction. Christian leaders make claims that if you come to their church your life will be changed and everything will be amazing!

But my guess is that many of us have had an experience of faith that has not always moved from confusion to joy but rather confusion to despair. If this is you, then Peter is someone you need to get to know back to front. For in his own journey you may see a way forward.

If we come to consider the whole evening before Jesus' crucifixion from the sharing of the Passover meal to Jesus' arrest, it

really was the brewing of a perfect storm. Think about this from Peter's perspective – starting at the Passover meal.

He had not expected to be called upon as a servant to prepare the meal. He had not expected to find Judas sitting at his place beside Jesus at the meal. He certainly didn't expect to see the Master, who only a few days earlier had been glowing white at the transfiguration, kneeling before him like a common slave, washing his dirty feet. He had not expected to see the emotional breakdown he had just witnessed from Jesus in the garden. And having attacked one of those coming to arrest Jesus Peter had been rebuked for what he thought was the very proof of his faithfulness to Jesus! After all, shouldn't his courage in the garden be something a person called

The Rock should possess?

But above all, Peter had never expected Jesus to give up. This was the culmination in a long series of confusing disappointments that evening for Peter. And it was because – and here’s the key – Jesus had profoundly failed to meet Peter’s expectations. Peter’s concept of the Messiah could be summed up in this: The Messiah will never submit, surrender or serve. And yet Jesus had done all 3 of these things in the past few hours!? This whole section is about Jesus not meeting Peter’s expectations.

Peter’s three time denial of Jesus is just the final straw in a 12 hour stretch of constant disappointment. When Peter said to those in the courtyard; “I am not one of

his followers” he was speaking from his fearful heart. Jesus was not the Messiah Peter had hoped for.

There are few sadder pictures in the Scriptures than the sight of Peter that night. Totally confused, angry, despairing, hurt, and left in the corner of a courtyard to weep bitterly. Author Michael Card captures it succinctly: “The denials broke Peter in the best sense of the word.” For it was Peter’s own expectations that the way of the cross was not the way of the Messiah that needed breaking. And with it his whole understanding of how God works in this broken world of ours.

Think & Pray

Stepping back a little bit. Do you ever

wonder why the apostles recorded a moment like this in their account of Jesus' life? I mean the disciples come out of the gospels second only to the religious leaders as the great screw ups of the story. As the early church started growing, these are the texts the church would be reading. Why would the disciples include such denial and brokenness in their accounts?

I take it, the answer lies in their desire to share with us the true heart of Christian faith. The central reality of following Jesus. The story of Peter is one that begins with great promise, but gradually slipped into misunderstanding, doubt and fear, arrogance, betrayal, denial, and flight. But what must not be missed in John's account of the role of Peter and the disciples is that however frequently they fail, Jesus

never abandons them. Even in the chaos, Jesus is in control.

In Mark's account of this night he writes,

‘You will all fall away,’ Jesus told them, ‘for it is written:

“I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.”

But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.’

After I have risen I will go ahead of you – in other words things are going to keep moving forward!

And as the early Christian community read the account of not just Peter's betrayal but of all the disciples' betrayal, they did this as a community of Christians continuing

to take the Lord's Supper, that continued in its attempts to follow Jesus' way of life by means of the cross and they continued to proclaim that as God the Father did not forsake the Son, nor will the Son forsake his faltering followers.

We as a community still proclaim this today and we build our lives upon it. God's saving power has continued and still continues to free fragile disciples from their failure, fear and flight to this very day.

Even in the chaos, Jesus is in control. Take time today to reflect upon what this reality means for you. This day, this week, this month. Even in the chaos, Jesus is in control.

Why not pray and thank God that he

doesn't give up on us? And that our failures are not final because of the death and resurrection of our saviour Jesus.