

“Last Man Standing”

Mark 14:17-31

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Communion Devotion

This morning, our attention is drawn to a scene in the Upper Room the night before Jesus was crucified. Jesus gathered with the disciples in Jerusalem to commemorate the Israelites' release from bondage in Egypt by eating the Passover meal and recalling the details of that epic journey to freedom. Jesus also took advantage of this opportunity to tell the disciples about his journey to the cross the next day.

As shocking as the news about his impending arrest and crucifixion must have been, it was Jesus' words about the disciples' behavior the next twenty-four hours that sent them reeling in disbelief. He informed the disciples that one of them would betray him, one would openly deny ever knowing him, and the rest would abandon him, three things which were inconceivable to them.

Peter was the most vocal of the disciples that evening, which is no surprise. He was the leader of the twelve disciples and rarely missed an opportunity to express his opinion.

“‘Even if all fall away, I will not,’ Peter declared. ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘today- yes tonight- before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.’”

Peter insisted emphatically, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ And all the others said the same.” (Mark 14: 29-31)

It did not take long for Jesus' prophecy to come true. Moments later, Judas left the table and betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

Later that evening, Jesus was arrested, bound and taken to the high priest's courtyard. Peter was standing nearby around a fire with several other people in order to keep warm. Three times Peter was asked if he was one of Jesus' disciples, and all three times he adamantly denied it. After the third denial, Peter heard a rooster crow, which no doubt pierced his heart

like a dagger. The disciple who assured Jesus he would be the last man standing was one of the first to fall!

How does this story speak to us today? I think it reminds us what it means to be human. We don't always keep our promises.

Peter certainly did not, in spite of his insistence that he would. In less than three or four hours, Peter broke one of the most important promises he made.

Why did Peter break his promise and let Jesus down? He underestimated how tough it would be to remain faithful to Jesus. I am sure Peter knew this promise would be tested, but he never dreamed this challenge would be this difficult.

On the other hand, it appears Peter was overconfident. Not once did he ask Jesus for advice or help that evening. He just bragged about how Jesus could count on him when the chips were down.

I grin each time I see the insurance commercial featuring Flo and a man who is watching someone juggle chain saws. Evidently this man recently purchased insurance at a good price which gave him an adrenalin rush and an "I can do anything" attitude. So, while watching this street entertainer juggle running chain saws, he shouts, "Give them to me. I got this. I can do this!" His wife, however, is quite upset over his burst of overconfidence and insanity.

I'm not sure what all of this has to do with insurance, but it seems to me Peter felt a little like the man who wanted to juggle chain saws. When Jesus tried to tell Peter how tough the next few hours were going to be, in essence he told Jesus, "I got this; don't worry." Jesus knew better, as Peter quickly found out!

How do you think Peter felt later that night and all that weekend? You know how you feel when you let others down. It's horrible, isn't it? Now you know how Peter felt.

How did Jesus handle Peter's arrogance and unfaithfulness? He forgave Peter, along with the other disciples who passed up opportunities to stand by Jesus, and he called them again to the work they had begun.

What advice do you think Peter would have for us this morning? Let me offer some ideas for you to consider.

Be careful what you promise. Every commitment made among friends will be tested in a hostile environment, and there are no exceptions.

Don't ever become overconfident. Humility is your greatest virtue when it comes to keeping promises. The moment you think you can handle by yourself the challenges and

temptations which will inevitably threaten your promises, you will fail. They are bigger than you are.

Keep your eyes focused on those who need you to keep your promises. See through eyes of faith the pain and agony you will inflict upon those you betray. In most cases, broken promises lead to broken hearts and broken dreams. Some wounds never heal, and those which do leave permanent scars. Do you really want to wreck other people's lives and shred their dreams? Are you being naïve to think this will not happen?

Listen to those who can see what you can't and know what you don't. Don't shrug them off when they warn you of impending danger by trying to impress them with your bravado. Seek their counsel and advice. Ask them how they remained faithful in the heat of the battle. Enlist their help to hold you accountable so you can keep your promises. Be honest and transparent with them. Pray with them.

Ask God to help you keep your promises. Lean on God every day. Exchange your weakness for His strength, because all things are possible when you rely upon God's strength instead of your own.

What promise are you struggling to keep today? What part of Peter's advice do you need to take to heart? Talk to God about this as the tray and cup are passed in a few moments.