

THE FIRST 15

Wednesday, May 15, 2024

Today is Wednesday, May 15 and we are studying the Gospel of John chapter eighteen.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and Loving God, in the morning I lift my heart to praise you. I pause at the beginning of this upcoming day to seek your presence and put you first. Thank you for always being with me and reminding me that you are working all things together for my good. Help me still my scattered thoughts, calm my breath and focus on your loving kindness. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in. "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" she asked Peter. He replied, "I am not." It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself. 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." 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?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow. John 18:15-18, 25-27

REFLECTION

Just a few hours earlier, before the meal, Peter promised Jesus he would follow him anywhere and even lay down his life for him. Although Peter was well intentioned, Jesus knew that was not possible. He responded, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!" (John 13:38). Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times before morning arrived. To Peter's dismay, that prediction is about to prove true.

When Jesus is arrested, Peter follows at a distance with another (secret) disciple to the High Priest Caiaphas' house where Jesus is being questioned inside. The Sanhedrin was called together late at night for this rushed interrogation. Outside, a servant girl questions Peter first. She serves as a kind of gatekeeper. Peter is afraid and denies that he is Jesus' disciple. Inside the courtyard, they stand around a charcoal fire that the servants have built. Peter is questioned twice more. Aren't you his disciple? Weren't you with him? A relative of the man whose ear he cut off in the garden recognizes him. Peter denies he knows Jesus. He denies he was with Jesus. He denies he follows Jesus. He lies to protect himself.

Peter hears the rooster crow, just as Jesus predicted. John does not record this, but Luke says Peter "went outside and wept bitterly." (Luke 22:62). Peter had done what he thought was impossible for him to do - deny knowing the one true Son of God. He had failed. The scene is

full of darkness and dark images. Jesus is being interrogated inside; Peter is denying knowing him outside. Jesus is inside telling the truth. Peter is outside telling lies.

We all carry around memories of our failures. Heavy baggage that we bear in shame. How could I have let that happen? Why did I fail to be there when I should have? How did I miss the signs? How could I ignore the potential outcomes? If only we could go back and make another choice, take back our words, change our decision, select a different path, choose better. We only get one chance in life and the consequences of words spoken and actions taken remain. We have to wait for the end of the Gospel of John to see the beautiful ending for Peter (John 21). Jesus comes and reconciles Peter to himself, forgiving him three times for his three-part denial. Jesus offers us that same opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation. We only need to go to him with a humble heart and ask him.

Ask: Where are my places of regret, guilt and sorrow for past mistakes? How might Jesus want me to bring those to him for forgiveness, reparation and reconciliation?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, you see everything in my past, present and future. You know all there is to know about me. I come to the foot of the cross with a sorrowful, humble heart seeking forgiveness for the times I have fallen short. I lay before you my regrets, my mistakes, my stupid decisions and wrong choices. Offer your merciful reconciliation, bring your peace, heal my errors, and help me mend any damage I have done to myself or others. Give me wisdom to make good choices in the future. Amen.