

Sermon Text for March 11, 2018

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Exodus 32:19-24, Mark 14:27-31

“How did that happen?”

It has been an extraordinary few weeks here at First Presbyterian. We have come off a high that we will not soon forget on Preschool Sunday with more people in worship than we would have for Easter. We are finally stabilizing our staff structure with the hiring of a youth director, I wanted to introduce him to you now. We have hired an interim organist choirmaster. All of this in the season of Lent when we have been called to be device free. We just got back from a mission trip which was incredibly powerful which we will share with you all on Palm Sunday. All of these things are positive, and sometimes you can ask yourself the question when things happen in life: How did that happen? We were coming off a bit of puzzling news from the new year as we had a dip of one or two in attendance last year. It didn't seem to make sense because of the growth that we have been experiencing in other areas of the church.

But things seem to be moving forward in a way that we had hoped for this year. But we do find ourselves in the middle of Lent and we see today in Mark our Savior Jesus Christ with his disciples at the apex of their ministry. Things are going so well, in the Scripture that we read Palm Sunday has already taken place, the Passover, the Last Supper has already taken place. They sing their theme song together and head out toward a garden to pray together. Things are going well, they are going so well. And then Jesus drops a bomb, You will all desert me. How does that happen? Has that ever happened in your life where from one day to the next your life has been changed, turned upside down and you think back just to a few hours before and realize how different things were? How did that happen?

The disciples bond with Christ and make promises to him and yet they somehow seem to forget all of that and turn their backs to him. We find ourselves asking the questions how did that happen? And it is important to ask that questions because you know the saying if you don't learn history or if you forget history then what? You are destined to repeat it. Today we will learn again our history as Christians who have

forgotten Christ. Today in our Scripture we come across a reminder of all that Christ has done for us so that we can certainly keep his sacrifice before us, and remember to follow him.

READ

There is no denying that Jesus and his disciples were very close. They were practically a family. For the last three years they had lived together, they had all things in common, they had shared the good and the bad together. They were a unified, solidified group. They had shared a lot of memories together. You know that as a family there are certain times in your life when you can look back and say we have had some really good memories when we were in that place or another. Well for Jesus and his disciples, they had some good memories about their time together. In our Scripture for today we find them immediately after taking part together in one of the most intimate, personal actions that a group could ever take part in: that was the Passover meal. We will be looking at Mark's rendition of this meal for Maundy Thursday in just a few weeks.

The Passover meal was in and of itself an exercise in remembering. The story of the Exodus and God's saving presence was replayed over and over again every year. In the upper room on that final evening Jesus and his disciples through the Passover meal were remembering God's salvation story for them. It was a very intimate, unifying time. That meal, more than any other meal, intensified their solidarity and their cohesiveness. During that meal they became ever more a close knit family unity. But in our first reading today we also see an aspect of that exodus that we are left wondering: how did that happen? Again, the Israelites were on a high, they had just escaped from Egypt, they were on the way to the promised land, God was feeding them quail and manna, water was coming out of the rocks, Moses had just left for a few to have a face to face with God.

Hey, I've got an idea, let's build an idol and worship it together. How did that happen? How could their memory have been so short term that they came up with this idea and it seemed like a good idea to the group. How did they lose their momentum, their focus, their cohesiveness as a family to worship and live their lives for God Almighty? How did that happen?

Mark tells us that after they had celebrated together this meal of remembrance they went out singing the hymn together. I love this image of Jesus and the twelve

around the table singing together. There are not artistic renditions that I know of that portray the last supper with Jesus and the 12 instead of being somber and morose but rather the twelve being joyful and hopeful, singing together the glory of their God's salvation story. But this is the scene that we find in Mark.

The Passover hymn that they would be singing was from psalms 113-118, you remember 118 from Sunday don't you? Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. They were singing songs of triumph and hope and assurance of God's presence in their history since their memory had been jogged during the Passover meal. The disciples and Jesus as a unified group, as a body became even closer during the eating and drinking of the Passover meal, they were together singing. What happens next leaves us wondering: How did that happen?

Jesus and the disciples go from the celebration of the bread and the wine of the Passover meal to the fleeing and the denial of those early morning hours. Jesus had warned them not to forget. He had even told them that they would forget using the words from Zechariah: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will scatter." He tries to prepare this close knit family for the fact that their unity is about to be threatened. The disciples wanted nothing of it. They objected, come on Jesus, you're spoiling the mood. Let's sing another song. Why are you so fatalistic, let's enjoy this evening. The disciples even become indignant and Peter makes a vow that really serves as a vow for all of the disciples: "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you". Not even 6 hours later Peter finds himself by a campfire surrounded by people and he hears himself say: "I don't even know that man." How did that happen?

From the time we were confirmed, or from the time that we gave our lives to Christ we have become a part of the history of God's salvation plan. If we call ourselves Christian, and I would assume that we do, then at one time in our lives we have said to Christ and meant it: "Even though I must die, I will not deny you." We have made that promise and through that promise we have joined the family of believers whether here at First Presbyterian or at another church. Like the disciples we are a part of that body of believers that celebrates and remembers God's presence in our lives through history. But how quickly we forget.

It is not long after the Sunday service that we say, boy I need to go to church more often, but when the opportunity arises we forget our little vow. It isn't long after we sing I surrender all and make that vow, that on Monday morning we get angry at a co-worker and we forget that all means all. It isn't long after we sing turn your eyes upon Jesus that we turn our eyes lustfully to the sin of the flesh, and think after all we are only human. It isn't long after we give our offering to the church and hear the preacher say that everything we have is a gift from God that we go home and read the business section and we are depressed because our portfolio in one day lost all of its gains over the past 3 years.

How does that happen? We make promises "I will never deny you" and then we deny Christ in so many ways in our lives.

Brothers and sisters we need a reminder to help us not forget the vows that we have made to Christ and to remember the sacrifice that Christ has made for us. Lent is a time when we are faced with reminders not only on Sunday morning, but with our spiritual disciplines of reading Scripture, of praying, of good works, we have less of a chance of finding ourselves in a situation where we ask: how did that happen? I know many of you are not following the device free lent. That's okay, but let me share that it has made a difference in my life. My daughters say that the only reason I've done it is because I had a problem with it. That's true, but a sermon and a Lenten season isn't able to have an impact if it doesn't impact the person who originates it.

I am like Peter, at least the negative parts of Peter. I don't want to find myself one day asking that question when I have denied Jesus: How did that happen? I need to set myself up with disciplines, with checks and balances, with opportunities to serve him as opposed to ways in which I can deny him. Maybe you aren't like me. Maybe your life is much more under control by yourself and you don't need the discipline I do. Praise God for that. But if you aren't, then I encourage you to establish within your life disciplines that you can rely upon so that you are able to follow Jesus more closely. They will serve as reminders to the responsibilities that we have because of the vow we have made to Christ that even if we must die, we will not deny Christ.

Amen.