

Mark 14.66-72

Jesus is... disowned and abandoned

Amington

Sunday 14 April 2019

Regret

A woman awoke during the night to find that her husband was not in bed. She put on her robe and went downstairs. He was sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee in front of him. He appeared to be in deep thought, just staring at the wall.

She saw him wipe a tear from his eye and take a sip of his coffee.

‘What’s the matter dear? Why are you down here at this time of night?’ she asked.

‘Do you remember twenty years ago when we were dating and you were only 16?’ he asked.

‘Yes, I do,’ she replied.

‘Do you remember when your father caught us in the back seat of my car kissing?’

‘Yes, I remember.’

‘Do you remember when he shoved that shotgun in my face and said, ‘Either you marry my daughter or spend twenty years in jail?’

‘Yes, I do,’ she said.

He wiped another tear from his cheek and said, ‘You know... I would have gotten out today.’

But seriously folks... regret is a powerful emotion. We regret bad choices, mistakes and missed opportunities. Regret comes when we have only ourselves to blame – and so our disappointment and frustration and anger is turned inwards, onto ourselves; which means regret often goes hand-in-hand with shame.

Some people say they have ‘no regrets’ – but I confess I’m not sure I believe them. I suspect that, if I asked each one of you, the thing you regret most in your life, it wouldn’t take long to come up with something... The struggle is more likely to be, ‘which one do I pick’ rather than, ‘I can’t think of any’!

This morning I’d like us to think a little about regret, and how we handle it *well*.

Courtyard

Our reading really starts in verse 53:

They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

Mark 14.53-54 (NIV)

When Jesus was arrested his disciples *all* ran away, but Peter crept back, unwilling just yet to abandon Jesus. He followed behind **at a distance**, Mark says, all the way to the house of the **high priest** – Caiaphas. There, in the **courtyard**, Peter sat with the guards... and some of the mob who had arrested Jesus.

It was an incredibly brave thing to do, really – Peter was putting his life in danger, because if anyone recognised him he could well be arrested and charged, exactly like Jesus.

It seems to me there is a link here with how Peter walked on the water. Stepping out of the boat in the middle of a massive storm was a hugely brave thing to do. And yet, **when he saw the wind, he was afraid**, and began to sink (Matthew 14.30). **‘The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,’** Jesus said (14.38).

Denial

Have you ever recognised someone famous? I remember being bizarrely excited in an airport, seeing Terry Wogan through some glass panelling, making his way to the VIP area. I can't imagine what it must be like, walking around knowing that pretty much everyone knows who you are.

Peter was getting away with it because Jesus had been arrested in the dead of the night, and they didn't have streetlights in those days, so it had been pretty dark.

But then **one of the servant-girls** thought she recognised him.

Picture it – Peter standing there warming his hands by the fire, maybe trying to joke with the guards, letting them assume that he had been part of the mob, rather than one of Jesus' followers – but the other side of the fire, **one of the servant-girls** is giving him sidelong glances. We've all done it when we see someone and half recognise them – we want to have a good stare to try and figure out who they are, but we don't want to be rude!

Well, the servant-girl had none of our British sensitivities – she went straight up to Peter and **looked closely at him. 'You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,' she said** (67).

More than a little flustered, **Peter denied it. ‘I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,’ he said, and went out into the entrance** (68) – that is, further away from the light of the fire.

But she was persistent. She appealed to the others in the mob for corroboration. **‘This fellow is one of them,’** she said (69). Note the accusing tone of ‘them and us’ – Jesus’ band of followers were seen as troublemakers, so to be **‘one of them’** was dangerous now Jesus had been arrested. **Again [Peter] denied it** (70). He was – understandably – afraid. **When he saw the wind, he was afraid.**

However, thanks to the servant-girl, everyone was looking more closely at Peter now, and his Northern accent gave him away – **‘Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean,’** they said (70).

Now Peter was really scared – when he was walking on water and **saw the wind**, he started to sink – and now he **began to call down curses, and he swore** an oath: **‘I don’t know this man you’re talking about’** (71). Some Bible translations are kind to Peter and suggest that he called down curses on himself, ‘May I be cursed if this isn’t true’ – something like that. But the word usually implies cursing *something else* – meaning Peter was probably calling down curses on Jesus, ‘May this man be cursed, whoever he is, I don’t care’ – something like that.

Picture the scene. Peter is calling down curses, swearing on oath that he's never even *heard* of Jesus, so he can't be one of his band of followers – the camera pans out to the room inside where Jesus is 'on trial', and we see Jesus in the background. The cock crows, and as Luke tells us Jesus turns and looks straight at Peter. We see the colour drain from his face as Peter remembers Jesus' words to him earlier in the evening: **'Before the cock crows twice you will disown me three times'** (72). Peter collapses, and somehow makes it out of the courtyard, devastated.

Why was he so devastated?

Because his closest friend was being beaten and there was nothing he could do.

Because it meant he had broken his promise to Jesus that he would never disown him (14.31).

Because *Jesus knew it was going to happen*.

When you picture Jesus looking at Peter in that moment, I wonder what *you* see in his eyes? Do you see accusation? Disappointment? Anger? Pain? Sadness? *Pause* Love? Forgiveness? Compassion?

What do you think is in Jesus' eyes when he looks at *you*?

Godly Sorrow

Peter disappears from Mark's gospel now – this is the last we hear of him, apart from a little hint in 16.7 when the angel at Jesus' empty tomb says, '**Go, tell his disciples and Peter...**'. And of course we know from the rest of the New Testament that Peter's story doesn't end with him denying Jesus.

But how do we know about Peter's denial of Jesus? He was alone – *which means he shared this story afterwards*. He was not too proud, nor too ashamed, to admit denying even knowing who Jesus was.

The question is: how do we get from Peter the denier, weeping bitterly, full of shame and regret – to Peter the apostle, preaching the gospel with such confidence and power, healing the sick in the name of Jesus, the leader of the early church?

In his second letter to the Christians in Corinth, Paul wrote this:

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

2 Corinthians 7.10 (NIV)

You see when we sin – deliberately, unintentionally, by mistake – there are three ways of handling it.

The first is the ‘victor’ response: full of pride, we deny doing it, or deny it was sinful, and insist we’re in the right. It’s so much easier to point out other people’s flaws and problems than admit our own... we are right, *they* are wrong. But this is to be deluded:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1.8 (NIV)

This is *not* how Peter went from denying even knowing Jesus to leading Jesus’ church. He *knew* he had betrayed Jesus.

The second way to handle sin is the ‘victim’ response: we wallow in despair and self-pity, complaining about pretty much everything and everyone else. I call this the ‘every silver lining has a cloud’ mode – we see sinfulness everywhere, except within ourselves.

In ‘victim’ mode we end up living in the past, dwelling on our mistakes, perhaps on the key moment ‘where it all went wrong’. And in fact the ‘victim’ response ends up in a similar place to the ‘victor’ response – because it places the blame *somewhere else*. If we’ve made a bad decision we rationalise it by figuring how other people or situations outside our control led us, or even forced us to make that bad decision. And so we wallow ever more in self-pity.

This is the **worldly sorrow** that Paul was talking about. As he said, it **brings death** because there's no way out of the mud – we get stuck on repeat.

But there's a third way – the third way to handle sin is what Paul called **godly sorrow** – and this is what Peter showed. Notice the sorrow is *real*. Friends, the truth is we are broken and full of sin, we are not lovable, we don't deserve to be loved by God – in fact Paul calls us God's *enemies* (Romans 5.10).

We *should* be full of sorrow for everything we do, say and think, and for everything we *don't* do, say or think, that shows our pride and rebellion against God. We *should* be full of sorrow for the hurt and the pain we cause others, for our pride and greed and self-centredness.

Notice the first two ways of handling sin are all about *me*: *I* am right, *I* am the victim here. **Godly sorrow** *starts* with me, but instead of justifying *myself*, it cries out to God for mercy. Instead of insisting *I* am right or listing all the ways *I* deserve better, **godly sorrow** admits *I* am a sinner, a betrayer, selfish and proud, and it says, 'Sorry.' **Godly sorrow** leads to this change in attitude, heart and mind. And **godly sorrow leads to salvation and leaves no regret** because when we turn back to God, we find forgiveness.

The truth is we are broken and full of sin, we are not lovable, we don't deserve to be loved by God. That's the bad news.

But the good news is that *God loves us anyway*. The look Jesus gave Peter? It wasn't full of anger and hate, but compassion and love – which no doubt – at first – made Peter's tears all the more bitter – and yet it showed the path out of his despair – and ours.

For that is the look in Jesus' eyes when he sees *you*. He longs to forgive, to shower his love and his life and his Spirit on us – if only we would change our attitude, heart and mind, and turn towards God instead of focusing on ourselves all the time.

Friends that is what it means to repent – and it is how to handle regret well.

Instead of insisting we've done nothing wrong, instead of insisting it's someone else's fault, we all need to learn to 'think different', to admit our sin, and receive the forgiveness and love and fresh start that *only* God has to offer.

Please can I encourage you this week, to think about how you need to change your attitude and heart and mind, so you can come to God in repentance, so you might receive his forgiveness and love.