

"Dear Apostles, I Apologize" March 3, 2024, Rev. Brian R. Louis, Faith Presbyterian Church

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, with the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Holy Wisdom, Holy Word.

Why did the baker give up bread for Lent?

He kneaded a break.

Why did the athlete give up running for Lent?

He wanted to walk with Jesus.

This past Wednesday in the *Coffee With Calvin* brown bag lunch seminar, we were talking about sin and how it is important for us to admit when we are wrong, or when we've harmed someone. We talked about how sin is separation from God. And when we sin against someone, or hurt someone, we create separation between that person and ourselves. And sin against someone, one of God's children, creates separation between God and us. Until that wrong is righted somehow, whether it is in apologizing to the person, or confessing the sin to God, the separation we feel remains.

So today, I need to right a wrong and in the company of this congregation, I want to confess and apologize to the twelve apostles for making fun of them over the years for not being too bright. I have judged them and mocked them for not understanding some of the parables Jesus taught. So, this morning, I apologize to the twelve apostles, for judging them, and making fun of them over the years.

The truth is, I wouldn't have been any quicker to catch on to what Jesus was saying or doing any more than they were. For example, would I have been able to make sense of the parable of the sower and the seeds dropped on the ground in Mark 4? Probably not.

And I don't know if I would've been as smart as the disciples who according to today's Gospel reading, remembered that Jesus spoke about the temple being destroyed and that he would raise it up in three days. After he rose from the dead, they remembered the scripture and what he said and realized he was speaking about the temple of his body. In the moment, however, they didn't know what he meant. But after the resurrection, they pieced it together, and what he said made sense.

Sometimes it takes time and distance for us to make sense of an event, or the words someone says to us, just like the disciples in today's Gospel reading.

Many times, in the moment, we don't know why something is happening in our lives. An event will mean little or nothing. And it is only afterward that it does mean something, like in the gospel story.

We're like the disciples, aren't we? We go through an experience, it doesn't have to be good or bad, it can just be an event, and it won't have meaning for us until later on, when it hits us what its meaning was.

Or we go through a time of trial or suffering, and we wonder, why? Why is this happening? What did I do to deserve this?

Jesus wondered this too, didn't he? When he is on the cross, he cries out to God using the words of the 22nd Psalm, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus knows he must suffer and die. He tells the apostles of his coming suffering, but they do not understand why he must suffer. At that moment on the cross, Jesus wonders aloud why his father has abandoned him as he endures the tremendous suffering of the cross.

And then there is the experience in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he was crucified. Jesus, being fully human, begs for God to let the cup of suffering pass by him. In the garden that night, his agony was so great he sweat so hard that the sweat was like drops of blood. And then on the cross he cries out to God, asking why this was happening. Why has God abandoned me, he exclaims. Why?

One thing I hear quite a bit as a pastor is the question, why is this happening? Why is this happening? We can't help but try to make sense of things. It is human nature to try and make sense of suffering, or terrible circumstances in our lives.

PAUSE

I've got some good news, and bad news. The good news is, sometimes it is disclosed to us, or we realize ourselves after the fact why we went through such a terrible time, where we gain some insight into why something happened. Sometimes it is well after the fact that a reason is disclosed to us, or it hits us out of the blue, and we make sense of it somehow.

PAUSE

I think most times we can make sense of things that happen in life. We can reframe the question from why did this happen to, "What was I supposed to learn from this?" For example, why didn't I get that job? Well, maybe down the road we realize it wouldn't have been a good fit. Or why didn't that romantic relationship or marriage work out? Well, perhaps we realize that we had some more growing to do, and we weren't ready for that relationship. Why did I have that horrible boss years ago? Maybe it was because I needed an example of the kind of boss I didn't want to be. Those are a little easier to answer. Other questions are harder.

Why did I get cancer? Why did I get heart disease? Maybe we aren't going to know, and perhaps it is incumbent upon us to make peace with that. Maybe we are not going to come up with a reason that makes sense for us. Maybe it is just the twists and turns of human life. Sometimes we will like the twists and turns, and other times we won't.

It is in these times where we don't have any clear answers, and we are faced with a task that is difficult to confront. It is the task of putting our trust in God. Where we are faced with an inexplicable event in our lives, or in the life of the world, and we can choose to say, or not, as the case may be: God I put my trust in you. I trust that you are a loving God, and I do not know why some of these things happen. I cannot know your mind or your ways. They are outside of my comprehension. I pray for the willingness to trust in you God, even with all these things I don't understand.

That doesn't mean we don't keep trying to find answers and figure it out, why these things happen. When we do that and try to make meaning of these things, it is a sign that we continue to be engaged in growing our faith and trust in God.

It is in these times that we are driven to a deeper understanding and reflection on our faith. That idea I talked about with Lent being a time for us to work on growing and deepening our faith, this is one of those ways we can do it, by examining and grappling with these big questions of faith.

Ultimately, it seems to come down to trusting God, and trusting God with our lives. When we don't have satisfying answers to the difficulties of life, we are faced with another question: what do we do now?

How do I make my life as good as it can be in service of God and those we encounter? What do I do now? If I cannot make sense of something, what can I do to make it better? Is there something I can do to help ease some suffering and make something better? How can I set a good Christian example and glorify God?

Here in Lent I think of all the questions the disciples had to grapple with. Why did Jesus have to be arrested and die? How frightening and traumatic all of that must have been for the apostles. As Jesus lay in the grave, the meaning of his words from our gospel lesson this morning of him raising the temple after its destruction in three days did not come to them. It was only after the triumph of the resurrection that it made sense to them.

Perhaps it is that way for us. Perhaps that is the time when all will be known, after we are raised to eternal life with our Lord Jesus Christ, when we experience the glorious light of the resurrection.

But for now, here on earth, in this season of Lent, we are walking through the solemn days of the final weeks of the public ministry of Jesus, and soon, we will remember the dark days of when he is betrayed, crucified, and lays in the tomb. But around the corner is the glory of the resurrection, when all is made new again, and the hope of the life to come shines over all of us, and all those things that don't make sense make sense, and the hope that all lessons will finally be learned occurs.

Amen.