

**First Presbyterian Church,
Marianna, Florida**

Lenten Luncheon: Tuesday, March 29, 2011

Welcome and Thanks to the Good News Women and The Wildflowers for the Luncheon

Unison Prayer:

Gracious God, we thank you again for this Season of Lent. We praise you for the opportunity it provides for us to share in these times of fellowship and food together, and most of all, to reflect on what the death of Jesus upon the cross means in each of our lives. As we remember the words and the actions of some of those who participated in some way in his death, or who witnessed his suffering or death on the cross, so we pray that you will help us to use this Season of Lent to see again how our words and our actions often reflect theirs. Grant us, we pray, the courage to use this season of the year to examine our own lives in these ways in the assurance of the love and the grace which you have shown for us, and for the whole world, in the life, the suffering, the death on the cross, the burial in the tomb, and the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ your Son, for it is in his name that we pray. Amen.

Opening Hymn No. 24

“Love Lifted Me”

Stanzas 1 and 2

Jesus Warns Peter That He Will Deny Him

Matthew 26:31-35

Leader:

Then Jesus said to the disciples, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

People:

Peter said to Jesus, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you."

Leader:

Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times."

People:

Peter said to Jesus, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you."

Peter Reflects on his Promise to Jesus

Why did he not trust me? What was he thinking? He meant so much to me. He had changed my whole life in the past three years. There was no way I would desert him now, and to deny that I even knew him, that was just unthinkable. True, I was not sure what Judas was up to, and what all was going to happen to Jesus. I knew that he had upset a lot of people with his teaching and his miracles but certainly he had done nothing that was worthy of suffering or of death, so when I said I was ready to die with him I did not think that death for him was anything that was imminent. After all the good things he had done and all that he had said about God's love for all people why in the world would anyone want to harm him and make him suffer? True I remember him talking about needing to come to Jerusalem and to suffer and to die but surely this was not the time.

I do not know what you would have said or what you would have done if you had been in my place. But certainly at that moment when the pressure was not on and I did not in any way feel threatened it was easy for me to say I would be ready to die with him, and certainly that I would never deny him, despite what he might say.

I do not know what you would have said or would have done if you had been in my place. It was easy to say what I did then but unfortunately that was not the end of the story as far as I was concerned. After we left the Upper Room we went to the

Garden of Gethsemane. While we were there praying the soldiers led by Judas came and arrested Jesus. All of us fled away but I did follow at a distance to see what might be happening. Read with me now my story.

Peter Denies that He Knows Jesus

Luke 22:54-62

Leader:

Then they seized Jesus and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said,

Women: "This man also was with him."

Men: But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him."

Leader: A little later someone else, on seeing him, said,

Women: "You also are one of them."

Men: But Peter said, "Man, I am not!"

Leader: Then about an hour later still another kept insisting,

Women: "Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean."

Men: Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!"

Leader: At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Peter Reflects on His Denial of Jesus

I will never forget that look. He was too far away to hear what I had said but like me he must have heard that cock crow and remembered what he had told me. How terrible to think that with the way things seem to be going with the Chief Priest and others that this may be the last time that I will see him. What a way to end a

relationship that had meant so much to me. But I hope you can understand and I hope that if I ever see him again he will understand. It was obvious to me that I was in far greater danger than I had thought. I should have just stayed away. Obviously there were more people who were upset with all that Jesus was saying and doing than I had realized. As I listened to the conversations in the courtyard of the High Priest's house and heard a little of what was taking place inside, it became obvious to me that people were out for his blood and were determined to do whatever it took to get rid of him. I do not know why they were so upset with him, but I quickly came to realize that not only his life but my life was in danger as well if people associated me with him. What would you have done if you had been me? It is easy to condemn me for denying Jesus but given all of the circumstances would you have been any more loyal and faithful? I am not trying to justify myself. I am sorry for what I did. I am disappointed that I let him down, and did not heed his warning as he had told me what I would do. I do not know what is going to happen to Jesus. Even more I do not know what is going to happen to myself and to the rest of us as his disciples. I do know that his face as he looked at me will haunt me for the rest of my life. How could I be such a failure? How could I let him down so badly? Why was I such a coward? Where was all my fine protest of loyalty when he really needed me? What in the world must he be thinking of me?

As we listen to Peter's story we have to wonder how much would we have ever heard of Peter if that encounter with Jesus had been the last for him. As we think about those times when we have denied our relationship with other people and let them down, or those times when other people have not been faithful in their friendship to us, and have disappointed us I would like to invite you to read with me the third part of Peter's story.

The Risen Jesus Speaks with Peter

John 21:15-17

Leader: When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter,

Women: "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

Men: He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."

Women: Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."

Leader: A second time Jesus said to Peter,

Women: "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Men: He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."

Women: Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep."

Leader: Jesus said to Peter the third time,

Women: "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Leader: Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?"
And he said to Jesus,

Men: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."

Women: Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Peter Reflects on his encounter with the Risen Jesus

I know he had said that he had to suffer and to die and on the third day be raised from the dead, but I certainly cannot say that I thought it would happen. True I had seen him raise Lazarus from the dead but to be raised from the dead himself just seemed too much to hope and believe. Then again I was not so sure that I really hoped that his words would come true. After all, that last time I had seen him kept haunting me. If he did come back to life what would he say to me, and how would he treat me. I certainly know how I would want to treat someone who had been as faithless to me as I had been to him. How amazed I was when those women came with the news that he had been raised from the dead and wanted me and his other disciples to know. I must admit, though, I was rather scared and apprehensive. Was this really good news? Was he coming back to judge me for denying him? Was he coming back to condemn me and

my fellow-disciples for deserting him? Each time I saw him after he had been raised from the dead I waited for the other shoe to drop. I was anxious to see when he would speak that word of judgment and of condemnation to myself and my fellow-disciples. You can imagine how hurt I felt when he asked me that third time whether I loved him. How he must have remembered as I did so clearly that it was three times that I had denied him. I thought it is finally here - that time that I had feared so much. Now he was ready to lay into me and to tell me what he thought of me for being such a failure, and for letting him down so badly. But even on this third time there is no word of judgment and of condemnation. Just still that word of commission, "Feed my sheep." How amazing that he would trust me to do his work. You can imagine how surprised and shocked I was. I am not so sure that if I had been in his place I would have been as ready to trust someone like myself again after how I had failed him, denied him and let him down. Maybe the way in which he treated me is showing me in a very personal way what all of this love and grace and mercy of which he had spoken so much really means. I am still not sure that I can be as forgiving and as accepting of other people who have let me down as he has been of me, but as I keep remembering how he has treated me I certainly am going to try to treat other people in the same way. That night when he was arrested and I had denied him, just before we left that Upper Room after he had washed our feet he had said that he was giving us a new commandment that we should love one another as he had loved us. At the time I did not realize what he meant. Now as I have experienced his forgiving love in my own life I recognize that obeying that commandment showing the same love for other people that he has shown for me is not going to be easy. How much when I am ready to judge and to condemn other people will I need to remember how in love he has treated me, and I will need to pray, "Jesu, Jesu, fill me with your love," because I know that it is only as I am filled with that love that I can possibly try to obey his commandment to love other people as he has loved me.

As I reflect on my own experience I would like to invite you to think about a

person in your own life who has let you down, who has failed to be for you all that you might have hoped and wished, as I was for Jesus. Now I would like to invite you to think about how you will look at that person if you stop and look at him or her with the eyes of Jesus, not with the eyes of judgment that I felt there in the courtyard of the High Priest's house, but with those eyes of love that I saw there as I shared breakfast with the Risen Jesus there on the beach.

Stepping out of the role of Simon Peter, I would like to invite you now to take just one minute and to pray for the person about whom you have thought as if you were looking at him or at her with the eyes forgiving, loving eyes of Jesus.

(Silent Prayer.)

As we continue this Season of Lent I would like to invite you to accept the challenge of Lent and for each of us during this week to spend just one minute a day praying for that person who has let us down and who has disappointed us as if we were looking at him or her with the forgiving, loving eyes of Jesus.

A hymn that comes originally from Ghana reminds us that like Peter in order to look at people with the loving, forgiving eyes of Jesus we need first of all to be filled with that love of Jesus ourselves. The hymn, especially the words of the refrain are really a prayer. I would invite you to join with me now in praying this prayer as found at Hymn No. 13 before we sing the refrain and stanza 1 and 2.

Closing Prayer will be prayed reading the Hymn, “Jesu, Jesu. Fills Us with Your Love” No. 13:

Refrain and Stanza One: All

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with Your love,

Show us how to serve the neighbors we have from You.

Kneels at the feet of His friends, silently washes their feet,

Master who acts as a slave to them.

Stanza Two: Women

Neighbors are rich and poor, varied in color and race.

Neighbors are near and far away.

Stanza 3: Men

These are the ones we should serve. These are the ones we should love.

All are neighbors to us and You.

Stanza 4: Women

Loving puts us on our knees, serving as though we are slaves.

This is the way we should live with You.

Stanza 5 Men

Kneel at the feet of our friends, silently washing their feet.

This is the way we should live with You.

Repeat Refrain: All

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with Your love,

Show us how to serve the neighbors we have from You.

Closing Hymn No. 13

“Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love”

Refrain and Stanzas 1 and 2

The Charge and Benediction from the Rev. Dr. Richard C. Halverson, Presbyterian Pastor and former Chaplain to the United States Senate:

Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God has a purpose for your being there. Christ, who indwells you has something he wants to do through you where you are! Believe it, and go in his grace and peace. Amen.