

Evotional

Bible passage: Mark 14:53-72

Sermon title: "Interrogation and Denial"

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Jesus before the Sanhedrin

We are reaching the climax of the confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders. Jesus has been arrested and is taken in the early hours of the morning to the house of Caiaphas the Chief priest where the Sanhedrin are assembled. There is something decidedly irregular about the whole proceedings.

Mark has interwoven the story of Peter's denial and the trial of Jesus. Jesus stands accused in front of 'Caiaphas' the most powerful of the Chief Priests in all Jerusalem, while Peter is accused by the servant girl and the others in the courtyard. It is possible he is encouraging us to consider how they each fair under questioning.

From the passage it sounds as though the outcome of the trial has been decided, the court is just looking for enough evidence to carry out their pre-determined sentence but they can't find any. There seem to be 'witnesses' there willing to testify against Jesus but they can't get their stories straight and they contradict one another.

Jesus is accused of claiming that he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. Interestingly nowhere in Mark's Gospel does Jesus speak about him destroying the temple and re building it. The nearest we have is Mark 13:2 where Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple. Although it is reasonable to assume that Jesus had said something very similar to the accusation because John records it in 2:19

"¹⁹ Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.'"

Jesus refuses to answer the accusation. So the high priest asks him directly, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' 'Blessed One' is just a pious phrase meaning 'God'

'I am,' says Jesus.

Jesus' words ring with echoes of the Old Testament and God's introduction to Moses when God identifies himself as 'I am.' The Sanhedrin seem to have got what they needed to justify the outcome they wanted and the violence that will lead to the cross begins.

Peter disowns Jesus

In the meantime Peter has been warming himself by the fire in the courtyard. A servant girl recognises him, not that surprising as Jesus and his disciples have spent the week in Jerusalem teaching and getting into trouble with the religious leaders, she addresses Peter directly – he denies it.

Then, a second time, the same girl this time addresses her question to those standing around, 'he was with him' again Peter denies it.

Now the crowd who've heard the servant Girls accusation join in, yes you were with him, you have an accent, you're Galilean. The Galilean accent is hard to hide, similar to a 'scouse' accent in English. A third time Peter denies it.

By this time it was morning, the sun is on its way up and the cockerel, the alarm clock of the first century crows. Then Peter remembers the word Jesus had spoken to him: 'Before the cock crows twice you will disown me three times.' And he bakes down and weeps.

I have one key question of today's passage. What is it that turns Peter, who normally seems so brave and confident into a coward?



I wonder if Peter shared a similar view of Jesus to Judas, a view of the messiah as the one who would liberate the Jews, and lead them out of occupation - the

Messiah as a military leader who would ultimately make the Roman's pay. A view of Jesus as their prize fighter and as long as he's with him nothing can go wrong!

But now, for some reason is seems to be going wrong. it's unravelling, Jesus has been arrested – that wasn't supposed to happen; now he's taken off in the night to trial – that wasn't supposed to happen either. Without prize fighter Jesus, Peter is afraid.



What lies behind this zealous prize fighter view of the messiah, is the same as lies behind every form of militant, fundamentalist, religion – fear.

People are afraid of all sorts of things so they grab hold of a prize fighter view of God. A Jesus who will defend them from the things they are afraid of.

It might seem strange that Peter managed to hold that view of Jesus in the face of all that he'd heard Jesus teach: Turn the other cheek, leave judgement to God, love your enemies, etc...

But then again, maybe we shouldn't be surprised, because all of that is in the bible, yet so many Christians around the world have a view of Jesus as the one who is on the side of the righteous (always their side) and who is going to crush the evil people (their enemies) and control the world. A view of God as 'my' champion who will deal with 'my' enemies – is all too common.

In this light the cross looks like weakness, Jesus arrest wasn't part of Peter's plan, it's all unravelling and his fear is coming to the surface.

Yet of course, Christianity isn't about us recruiting God (Jesus) on to our team to carry out our plan, but is about us joining God's team and trusting him with the plan that he has for the world.

To trust God and not live in fear, and sometimes that means to look weak, we need to let go of the prize fighter view of God.

Peter needed to learn this for himself, and maybe that's what was behind Jesus prophecy that before morning Peter would deny him three times. Jesus knows Peter's character and if he's going to build his church on the rock that is Peter, he needs to expose Peter's fear, so that he can make Peter aware of it and ultimately enable Peter can change it.

So he tells, macho Peter, that even he, before morning will run away scared and deny that he knows Jesus.

If that was the old fear filled Peter, let's compare him with the Peter we see later in the New Testament.

Read 1 Peter 2:19-21

Now that Peter has seen the resurrection, he understands more of God's plan and the role of the Messiah (The suffering servant spoken of by Isaiah). He's ready to place his confidence in Jesus way – he's ready truly follow Jesus.

New Peter understands what Jesus the Messiah was all about. He has a new confidence in Jesus. He understands the way of the cross and is learning to love his enemies.

So my challenge is this: do we have an old Peter mentality or a New Peter mentality?

Do we live in fear or confidence in God? If we're honest we probably live with a mixture of both.



Let's consider a contemporary event and reflect on our reaction to it. How do we respond to the death of Lee Rigby, the soldier killed by extremists in Woolwich, South East London.

It is clear that some sections of society have responded by advocating violence towards Muslims. This is a fear based response and part of an Old Peter mind-set. Fear of the other, the stranger.

A New Peter response might be to recognise that the actions of these men whilst truly horrific should not be allowed to foster a

fear fuelled backlash against all Muslims. After all do these two men represent Islam any more than Westborough Baptist Church represents evangelical Christians? Our response should be transformative and based on confidence in God. Which, I believe means we need to be reaching out to Muslims, finding points of connection and building relationships where we are able to learn more about each other and faiths.

Fear is always a bad motivator, as Yoda says: "Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering. I sense much fear in you".



Unfortunately a fear driven response is all too common in modern society and the media (not only the Daily Mail) specialises in pedalling fear. They seem to encourage us to be afraid of those who are different to us, the other, the stranger.

As Christians we are not supposed to be living in fear, we're not supposed to get caught up in this fear frenzy. Perfect Love casts out fear, God has not given us a spirit of fear...

Rather we need to let God be God, for he is competent to run the world. Our Job is not to try to be God, but to live like Jesus and love others. To be secret agents of the Kingdom, loving others like Jesus loved, serving others like Jesus and sometime even being prepared to sacrifice like Jesus.

Which mentality do you have, new Peter or old Peter?

Consider your default position towards Muslims, towards gay people, immigrants to the UK, people who are different... the other.

Do we have a fear based old Peter mentality which worries that 'they' are going to ruin my way of life? A view that sees them as a threat or do we have a new Peter mentality that has real confidence in God and therefore is able to reach out and love those who are different to us? - a mentality that seeks to bless the other.

Old Peter – New Peter	
Old	New
Mark 14:53-72	1 Peter 2:19-21
Prize Fighter Jesus	Messiah
Fear	Confidence in God
Wants Jesus on his team	Is on Jesus' team
Pre-Resurrection	Post-Resurrection
Bad decisions	Good decisions
Denial, violence	Able to love others

Do you have a neighbour who's a bit different to you? The new Peter kingdom way of living is to love that neighbour, reach out to that neighbour, bake cakes for that neighbour, not to seek ways to condemn them.

Let's pray.

Further Reading

<http://www.russellbrand.tv/2013/05/woolwich/>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2013/may/27/york-mosque-protest-tea-biscuits>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b02m7fz5> (listen from 2:22-2:28, article on JFK in the R4 Today programme)

Reflection Questions

1. What stood out to you most from the sermon on Sunday?
2. Ultimately fear is behind all militant, fundamentalist religion – do you agree?
3. Consider the messages you receive through the news and other media.
 - a. How much of it is fear based?
 - b. Make a list of messages that are based on fear that you have heard in the past week.
 - c. What actions were being advocated?
 - d. Do those actions demonstrate trust in God, or in something else?
 - e. What actions would demonstrate trust in God?
4. Take some time to reflect on things in your life that are stressful at the moment.
 - a. Is fear playing a part in this stress?
 - b. What fear-based messages are you hearing about this?
 - c. What would happen if you gave in to the fear messages?
 - d. Then think about how things would go differently if you trusted God radically with this issue.
 - e. Are you willing to do what's needed to trust God in this?

When we're afraid of something, a common response is to try and control the situation. And we can have good intentions; when we see evil things happening in the world we want to stop them! But our role in the Kingdom isn't to control others or force "God's will" on others. Our role is to trust God and simply love others as he's commanded us to. Where we see our own tendencies to control, they're probably due to fears we have, and likely reveal a lack of trust in God.

5. Which specific people in your life do you want to control?
 - a. Why do you want to control these people?
 - b. What fears do you have, either for them, for others or for yourself?
 - c. What do you believe will happen if you don't exert your influence on them?
 - d. You can go through this process to reflect on groups of people as well. What groups are you fearful of? Homosexuals? Muslims? Illegal immigrants?
6. How can we better be Jesus to these groups of people?