

Sunday 29th March 2020
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Matthew 26:69 – 27:10
Theme: “No future without forgiveness”
“Thank God for His forgiveness!!”
(No 5 of Jesus’ Last Week)

Introduction:

I want to talk this morning about shame, and about feeling ashamed of yourself as a person.

When we do something that we know is wrong, or when we hurt someone by something we do, we feel guilty over what we have done, *and we also often feel ashamed of who we are.*

Guilt and shame often go hand in hand. We feel guilty because of what we have done, and we often feel shame that we so ‘lousy’ a person that we would do such a thing. For example, if I lied to my wife, I might feel guilty because I lied to her, *but I also might feel deep shame that I am the sort of person who could lie like that.*

That’s not a real example, but I could give you many examples from my life where I’ve felt guilt over what I’ve done, and felt ashamed of who I am. And my guess is that you are no different.... *(see Smedes, Shame & Grace, 9f).*

Our Bible reading for this morning tells us about two people who felt guilty because of what they’d done, and who also obviously felt ashamed of themselves as people, because of what they had done. I’m talking about Peter and Judas. They both messed up badly. Peter denied even knowing Jesus, not once, not twice, but three times, and Judas betrayed Jesus to the chief priests and the elders. Both, we are told, were grief-stricken and full of remorse over what they’d done: they both felt overwhelmingly guilty over what they had done, and utterly ashamed of themselves as people.

But they didn’t respond to their feelings of guilt and shame in the same way. Peter implored God for forgiveness, and was forgiven by Jesus, and recommissioned by Jesus to be his apostle. Judas, on the other hand, despaired over his situation: the guilt and the shame that he felt led him to give up, and to commit suicide.

Let me tell you again the stories of Peter and Judas to remind you of the two paths that you can take when you feel guilty because of what you've done, and ashamed of the sort of person that you are.

Peter:

Peter was a brave, strong man, a man determined to follow Jesus no matter where Jesus went. When Jesus spoke about his coming death and said that when he died all his disciples would be scattered, Peter said, "I will never leave you, even though all the rest do". Listen to what happened next. Matthew tells us:

Jesus said to Peter, "I tell you that before the cock crows tonight, you will say three times that you do not know me".

Peter answered, "I will never say that, even if I have to die with you!"
(Matthew 26:34-35).

When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Peter took up a sword to try and fight a way out for Jesus (*John 18:10*). And when Jesus was arrested and led off to the High Priest's house, all the other disciples fled, except for Peter and John (*Matt. 26:56; John 18:15*). Peter even dared to follow Jesus into the grounds of the High Priest's house. There his courage, though, deserted him. Three times there, he was asked whether he was one of Jesus' disciples, and each time, progressively more vehemently, he denied knowing Jesus, *in order to 'save his own bacon', so to speak, and to prevent something similar happening to him, as was happening to Jesus.*

When he had denied Jesus three times, the cock crowed, and Peter remembered what Jesus had told him:

"I tell you that before the cock crows tonight, you will say three times that you do not know me" (*cf. Matt. 26:75*).

Whether it was a rooster crowing in the early morning, or whether it was the three o'clock in the morning trumpet call for the changing of the guard at the nearby Antonia barracks, *a trumpet call known as "the cock crow"*, we can't know. But what we do know is that Peter "went out and wept bitterly" when he realised what he had done (*Matt. 26:75c*).

We are not told anything much more than this about the sorrow of Peter over his actions, and we are told virtually nothing about his repentance.

We can only imagine his pleas to God for forgiveness....

What we *are* told in a fleeting way is that Jesus made a special appearance to Peter on Easter Sunday. When Cleopas and his companion returned to Jerusalem to tell the disciples that the risen Jesus had appeared to them on the road to Emmaus, Luke tells us that the disciples said to them: **“The Lord is risen indeed! He has appeared to Simon”** (*Luke 24:34; cf. 1 Cor. 15:5*).

What Jesus said to Peter when he appeared to him, we can only guess. But surely, Jesus said to him, *as Peter fell at Jesus’ feet*: **“God forgives you, Peter. And I forgive you. Get up”**

And we are told by John that Jesus later recommissioned Peter to be his apostle. Three times, Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?”, and three times after Peter affirmed his love for Jesus, Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep”, or words to that effect (*John 21:15-17*).

Peter’s guilt and his shame led him to fall on his knees before God and implore God for forgiveness. He was forgiven by Jesus, God’s Son, and picked up, and resent out by Jesus to serve him. Sadly, though, Judas on the other hand didn’t take the forgiveness that God, our Father, and our Lord Jesus would have gladly given to him if he wanted it....

Let me tell you again what happened to Judas, as a reminder of the other way that we *can* take in response to guilt and shame: the way of despair and self-destruction....

Judas:

We are not told why Judas betrayed Jesus to the chief priests and the elders, who were plotting to have Jesus killed. It may be that the devotion of Judas to Jesus turned to disappointment in Jesus and even to a despising of Jesus for not bringing in the Kingdom of God here and now, in all its glory, as he hoped. Or, it is interesting to speculate, maybe Judas wanted, by betraying Jesus, to force Jesus to act to bring in the visible Kingdom of God. Listen to what one writer says in this regard about Judas: **It may even be that Judas hoped to force the hand of Jesus by betraying him. This would make him act. This would induce him to bring in the Kingdom. Maybe even the kissing in the Garden, and the Greek word is of a very affectionate and repeated kiss, was not just a**

traitor's hypocrisy, but something real: he hoped that at that moment Jesus would call down the legions of angels to his aid and rout the enemy! Yes, it could just have been meant in good faith.

If it was, it shows in the darkest colours the peril of trying to do God's work in our own way. For it came most terribly unstuck. Instead of a shattering *climax with Jesus acting to bring in God's Kingdom*, Jesus meekly allowed himself to be taken away, and Judas realised with the blinding light of terrifying recognition that he had ruined everything and delivered his closest friend to death... (*M. Green, Matthew, p. 266*).

Whatever Judas' motives were, *and we can only guess as we have*, he certainly was utterly remorseful over what he'd done. He was filled with feelings of guilt and shame. Listen again as Matthew tells us what happened:

When Judas, the traitor, learnt that Jesus had been condemned, he repented and took back the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned by betraying an innocent man to death!", he said. "What do we care about that?", they answered. "That is your business!". Judas threw the coins down in the temple and left; then he went out and hanged himself (*Matt. 27:3-5*).

Judas went out and hanged himself, so black was his despair and his remorse. He could have turned, *like Peter*, to God, and implored God's forgiveness, and received God's forgiveness. But he didn't! He responded to his guilt and his shame by putting a rope around his neck....

We all, *each one of us*, muck up and mess up often in our life. Sometime, like Peter and Judas, we mess up badly, and we feel guilt because of what we've done, and we feel shame because we are such a 'lousy' person.

It is rumoured that a certain psychologist in one of the Iron Curtain countries during the days of Joseph Stalin had an uncanny way of getting people to confess to just about any crime against the state that Stalin wanted confessed. A visitor from the West is reported to have asked the psychologist for the

secret of his success. He was told by the psychologist:

"I work on the Mongolian peasant hypothesis"

"Mongolian peasant?"

"Yes, the secret of my success is my belief that everyone has a

Mongolian peasant”

“Tell me what you mean”.

The psychologist told this story:

“A nobody of a man, shabby and ill at ease, is brought into a large office that clearly belongs to an important person. Everything there smacks of authority: dark mahogany walls; a huge oak desk, uncluttered, a small flag on one corner of it; behind it, in a high leather chair, an erect grey-haired man wearing a general’s uniform with rows of medals on his chest *sits*.

The general speaks:

‘I have a million rubles in my desk drawer. Here, take a look. They are all yours’.

‘Mine?’

‘Yes, on one condition’.

‘What condition?’

‘You must press this small button on my desk’.

‘What happens when I press the button?’

‘An old man in Mongolia drops dead’.

‘He dies?’

‘Yes, he dies at once, with no pain’

‘What for? What has he done?’

‘That is not your business. Trust me. It is for the good of the people. All you need to know is that the moment you press the button, the peasant dies. And you get a million rubles’.

The man presses the button. He takes the money and goes home to live with the memory that to get some money he has killed a stranger who did him no harm. He would not have done it for a few rubles, of course. Not even for a thousand, not for ten thousand. But for a million? Who could refuse?

The man knows in his heart that the amount of money made no difference. He killed an innocent stranger to get it. After five years, he commits suicide. The million rubles are stuffed in a sack under his bed; the state take them back the day after the funeral”.

Everyone according to this psychologist, has a Mongolian peasant in his life. Everyone has once harmed another person for his own

advantage. The psychologist said that he digs around in the memory of the person he is trying to get a confession out of, until he finds that peasant. Once he has, he said, he dangles this memory in front of the accused person until that person is writhing in shame for being such a wretched human being. He will confess to anything in order to atone for his shame (Smedes, 23-24).

Now I don't know if this is all true: I read about it in a book on guilt and shame that I read in connection with this message. But what is true is that Satan uses the same tactics as this psychologist. Satan continually tries to remind each of us of the Mongolian peasants in our life, *the people we have hurt in our life by things that we have done*. Satan continually tries to drag us down into despair, and to try to take us along the road that Judas went. Satan continually tries to say to us:

“You are a lousy, miserable so-and-so. You don't deserve to live. You don't deserve God's forgiveness. You aren't worthy of any thing that God wants to give you. Give up on God, and give up on life”.

Satan tries to take us along the road that Judas went to despair and destruction.

But it is a road that we don't have to go down, and a road that God doesn't want us to go down. God loves each one of us. We are each special to Him, so special that He sent His Son, *part of His very self*, to this earth to suffer and die for us. He loves us, despite our mistakes and our failures, *and our Mongolian peasants*, and He is ready to forgive us, any time, any place.

He wants us always to go the way of Peter: to fall down on our knees before Him, and to confess our sin, and to receive His forgiveness, *a forgiveness that was made possible through Jesus' suffering and death for us, each of us*.

As John puts it in his first letter:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us. But if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive our sins and purify us from all wrongdoing....

I am writing this to you, my children, so that you will not sin; but if anyone does sin, we have someone who pleads with the Father on

our behalf – Jesus Christ, the righteous one. And Christ himself is the means by which our sins are forgiven, and not our sins only, but also the sins of everyone (1 John 1:8-9; 21-2).

Conclusion:

Don't ever despair when you mess up in life!

Don't ever despair over the Mongolian peasants in your life! Don't ever let the shame that you feel when you mess up drive you along the road of Judas to despair and destruction.

Come to God along the way of Peter and receive His forgiveness. See in your mind's eye, Jesus picking you up, *as he surely did with Peter*, hear Jesus' words of forgiveness, and hear Jesus say to you, "Go out and try again to live as God's child!".