



Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

MAUNDY THURSDAY MESSAGE

LUKE 22:7-27, 39-53

APRIL 14, 2022

“THE SOUND OF FAILURE...OR IS IT?”

“This is your hour....and the power of darkness.” These words form the conclusion of our reading from Luke tonight. Holy Thursday’s night sounds echo love and grace when in John 13, Jesus is at the table with his disciples, commanding them to love one another as He (was about to) love them. It was a foreshadowing of his departure, and Jesus’ command in John 13 comes into full view when in John 16 our Lord says *“it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you, but if I go, I will send Him to you.”* Jesus has come for this, to love us, and for this reason must also leave, in order that we His disciples might have time and space to fulfill this night’s great commandment.

But the night sounds of Thursday turn to a concession of the power of sin in Luke – *“this is your hour and the power of darkness”*. The residents of Jerusalem had greeted Jesus with desperate enthusiasm on the very first *“Palm Sunday.”* They waved palm branches and greeted Jesus as a liberator from Rome. It was a day of victory. But it was only the first parade of the week. There would be another. Jesus was at the head of the first...darkness and human sin were parade marshals of the second.

It may actually be easier for us to identify with the second parade than with the first. None of us will ever have crowds throwing garments before us, waving palm branches and praising our name. But all of us know what it is to fail. And so the central question tonight is...does failure have the final word? Does *“the power of sin”* have the final word over us? Is failure a dead end, a scarlet letter, an invitation to take a seat at the rear of the Christian bus? And are we to live in such a way as to avoid the possibility of failure altogether? We can’t, if we take seriously the setting for this meal Christians call our most holy act of worship...a meal eaten on the eve of failure.

In the 1950’s there was a player for the Washington Senators names Zeke Bonura, and he was described as sort of a clumsy infielder. But each season ol Zeke somehow managed to attain one of the best fielding averages in the major leagues. Some said he did it by recognizing an obscure baseball rule – that rule being you cannot be charged with an error unless you touch the ball. So, Zeke avoided touching anything that looked the least bit difficult. Sounds like a rule a lot of people follow even in their life of faith.

Yet what is failure but an opportunity to learn and grow and above all come under the grace of God? In II Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul, rather than boasting about his strengths, boasts about his weaknesses – concluding that God’s power is made perfect in our weakness, God’s faithfulness rises when our faith falters, God’s mercy overcomes our failure. But what does this mean - God's power is made perfect in weakness?

Sociologist and noted Christian speaker Tony Campolo gave a perspective in a story he told in the magazine Discipleship Journal about his Bible Camp counselor days – the incident took place the week the camp was invaded by middle school kids. He said everybody ought to be a counselor for that age group, because their concept of a good time, then apparently as now, seems to be picking on people. There was a kid named Mark with a speech impediment at the camp, may have been from a birth defect, but regardless, this kid was picked on a lot.

He would walk across the camp usually alone and other kids would line up to mock his attempts at getting directions to the next activity. "*Which . . . wa wa way iiiiss . . . the . . . crrraft . . . shop?*" he stammered - his mouth contorted with each word. And other kids mimicked in that same awful stammer, "*liit's . . . oooooover . . . theeeere Marrrrky.*" Tony's anger boiled over one morning. It was Mark's cabin's turn to give devotions. Tony wondered what would happen, because he had suggested Mark be one of the devotion leaders and the other kids all enthusiastically agreed. He wondered if they just wanted to get the poor kid up there to make fun of him. As he took his place at the front, you could hear giggles. It took him what seemed an eternity to say seven words. But this is what he said..... "*Jesus . . . loves . . . me . . . and . . . I . . . love . . . Jesus.*" And then Marky sat down.

When he finished, Tony saw middle school kids who'd been giggling now sniffing. He said the Bible camp directors used to try everything to get those kids interested in Jesus. They even imported baseball players who claimed their batting averages had gone up since they had started praying. But God chose not to use this concept of success. He chose a kid with a stammer, and a few wonderfully honest words – Jesus loves me...love one another.

"This is your hour and the power of darkness." Sin and Satan want us to fail and be labeled failures. They do few things better than accuse – except perhaps...divide. And why not – most of the time it works. But those powers, and they are real, don't like recalling that Jesus was himself accused of being a 'friend of sinners.' That's a problem I guess – for anybody but sinners that is.

Mozart, his is great work "Requiem" articulated the essence of this night, when he wrote "*Remember, merciful Jesu, that I am the cause for your journey.*" Yes, Jesus remembers. But you dear people, remember '*greater love has no one than this*'....An ancient Christian creed, based on John 8:12, says "*Jesus is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome.*" Tonight, as though with our Lord we descend into his passion, his hour of darkness, dare we believe this?
Tonight, of all nights, how dare we not? AMEN