

How do you deny Jesus?

The Rev. Mark D. Wilkinson, Rector
St. Aidan's Episcopal Church
Virginia Beach Va 23452
Good Friday Meditation

As I was preparing for my sermon following the Passion reading last week and as I read the full reading for today's service, I found myself pondering how not just Peter but all the disciples abandoned or denied Jesus in those final terrible hours. We make a big deal about Peter's denial but the Passion also says that they all fled. In most of the gospels, the disciples are missing from the crucifixion scene. It is only in John where the disciple Jesus loved is placed at the foot of the cross. However he is the only one. On the morning of the resurrection the disciples are in the house where they met, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish authorities. Only Peter and the disciple Jesus loved go to the tomb and even that account may in fact be a later insertion into the account of John. In the Synoptics none of the disciples go to the tomb, it is only Mary Magdalene and the other women who find the empty tomb. They of any are the ones who never abandon Jesus.

This led me to ponder how I, we, deny Christ in our daily lives. As I prepared for this sermon I was getting the gospel for Maundy Thursday back into my mind. This process gives me a lot of time to consider the words. The last commandment Jesus gives is the instruction to show love for each other. Not following that commandment is abandoning Jesus in its own way.

One of the challenges of my job during Holy Week is to stay in the moment of Holy Week while writing a sermon for Easter and the resurrection. We have 6 baptisms this Easter so preparing for that sermon has brought the 5 baptismal promises that we make to the front of my mind along with the Great Commission of Matthew. The great commission is the instruction that ends the Gospel of Matthew that tells us to go out into the world making disciples of all nations, We deny Christ when we turn our backs on these promises and this commission.

Mostly I think we deny Christ when we deny our own divinity, our own place in the church, in the coming of the kingdom, in the flow of love that flows through us in the Trinity. So this evening I want you to take a moment and consider how we all deny Christ at times. This is not an indictment of any of us nor is it a criticism. I don't think any of us can say we have never denied Christ. So after I read this prayer by Pastor Steve Garneer-Holmes I want us to sit in silence for a moment before we continue with a hymn and the Solemn Collects.

I deny you, Christ, when I deny my own divinity.
I deny you when I deny the divinity of those I condemn.
I deny you when I do not hear you in the oppressed and rejected.
I deny you when I turn from my glorious giftedness.
I deny you when I am afraid to stand with those at risk.

I deny you when in my guilt I doubt your love.
And still you love. Let remembering's bitterness awaken me.
Let my weeping be my wisdom.
To the frightening, to the infinite,
to the compassionate, to the holy,
help me say yes.
Let me die with yes on my lips.