

March 20

Third Sunday in Lent

John 18:12-27

“What Is Our Answer?”

1. Tracy and I have always been fans of TV police dramas, but during pandemic our viewing went international.
 - a. In the past two years we’ve binge watched on streaming services police dramas:
 - i. A genre called Nordic Noir (from Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland)
 - ii. but we also have seen series from India, Japan, Scotland, France and England.
 - b. In American police dramas, I’m sure you’ve heard the officers read suspects their Miranda rights: “You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law...” <http://www.mirandawarning.org/whatareyourmirandarights.htm> .
 - c. In the current series we’re watching (“Vera,” England) their detectives say (and I’m not even going to try an English accent): “You do not have to say anything. But, it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something which you later rely on in court...” <https://www.gov.uk/arrested-your-rights>
 - d. Silence isn’t the only option, of course, but both warnings state anything said could come back to hunt those questioned.
 - e. It’s in those British dramas where we see the suspects, feeling cornered in the interview, defiantly answering the detective questions: “No comment” – their way to claim their right to silence.
2. In our passage today, neither Jesus nor Peter opted for the “no comment” route
 - a. This Lent we have been focusing on the Last Week of Jesus.
 - i. Last Sunday the narrative focused on that Thursday, and for the remaining Sundays our timeframe will go in slow motion focusing on what John tells us happened in the late hours of Thursday and then in the early hours of Friday, a kind of a countdown to the crucifixion.
 - ii. Today’s story happens right after Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested by the religious police
 - iii. Jesus spends time before these authorities, who are both accusing and questioning him, something they had hesitated to do until this point
 - b. As Jesus was being questioned directly by religious leaders, Jesus knew how this would end – he knew this would lead to him being crucified
 - i. In this telling of the story, Jesus is strong and direct with his questioners
 - ii. He doesn’t back down, not even when being mistreated in custody
 - iii. Basically, his accusers were trying to trap Jesus into saying something for which they could punish him
 - iv. Jesus avoids their trap, pointing out that he’s never hidden his teachings and his record is public
 - c. Trying to eavesdrop on the proceedings from nearby, we see Peter and an unnamed disciple getting as close to Jesus as they could, without arousing suspicion
 - i. But Peter stood out in the crowd around the fire in that chilly night, and three different times someone says: I think you’re one of that guy’s followers!

- ii. Scared that he'd get arrested, Peter doesn't try to escape or to answer proudly, but instead Peter lies out of a survival instinct.
 - iii. A Little white lie. Or three, to avoid prison or worse. What's the harm?
 - iv. It's quite a contrast for Peter, who a few hours earlier had been embarrassed by Jesus trying to wash his feet and then told Jesus that he was all in, now here was Peter unable or unwilling to state plainly his connection to his teacher.
 - v. Peter was full of bluster but was weak.
- 3. When I was a kid, I remember getting at our church these little Bible story tracts, like little comic books
 - a. They were usually about the "End times" and tried to get us to think about not just what the right things to do were, but to kind of scare us into NOT doing the wrong thing
 - b. And in those little Christian comics, there were modern versions of that scene Peter faced, and in the storyline the question hung in the air: if someone asks you whether or not you are a follower of Jesus, will you say yes even if has some negative repercussions?
 - c. To be sure, I disagree today with the framework of those Christian comics, which relied on fear of not "making it to heaven" as the foundation of faith
 - d. But what I will say is that, considering what Peter did when faced with the option to stand with Jesus or run for his life, I think this gives us plenty to think about.
 - e. If the crime shows tout that one has "the right to remain silent" , this story says that our faith challenges us to show up and speak up.
 - f. That's not as easy as it may sound, of course. And it is much more than just about words
 - i. Our actions as followers of Jesus need to leave little doubt that we are acting out of a sense of faith
 - ii. Our actions as followers of Jesus need to point to a commitment to compassion and justice
 - g. Now, I know that our motivation isn't to get credit or the limelight or the pat on the back, which in a way may be why we volunteer and serve and care for others without articulating that such work and service is directly connected to our faith
 - h. But still, we have the challenge to frame what we do, and maybe even to join forces with other people of faith to stand up for what is right and faithful and caring
 - i. We show up and speak up, as Jesus would want us to, when we are come face to face with pain, or injustice.
 - j. We show up and speak up, not because we faith all figured out, not because we're Bible scholars who can explain thy mysteries of faith, and not because we want to convince others to believe in Jesus: we show up and speak up everyday in the mundane choices to live guided by a faith that is part of who we are, not just a thing we do a hour a week.
- 4. You may have the right to remain silent. But as a follower of Jesus, we are called to show up and speak up.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/peters-denial-2/commentary-on-john-1812-27-3>

Reflection Questions

1. Share a story when acting according to your faith brought push back.
2. Peter was an important disciple and a prominent figure in the history of the early church. Why would the Bible preserve a story which paints him in a bad light (John 18:12-27)?
3. Where is God asking us to show up and speak up today?