

Bennochy church 7th May 2017

We have all been there. Our loyalty is challenged and we feel ... Well how do we feel? Years of service to the company is quickly dismissed. You are no longer required. You are not even allowed to go and clear your desk or say farewell to colleagues. You are out the door. What was a central part of your life is gone. In its place, an empty space. A vacuum. When we meet someone for the first time, what do we ask? Their name, where they come from and what they do. You no longer 'do' anything.

A longstanding friendship comes to an end. You wonder what went wrong. Was it something you have said or did. The phone calls, the texts are no longer returned. You feel diminished. We are who we are, because of our relationships with others. Part of you has gone. What was once so close, is now so distant. If you ever met the person again, what would you say to them?

We have all been there. Our loyalty is challenged and we feel discarded, a sense of having been 'thrown away. We feel that we are no longer of value, worthless to society. We might feel that we have actually gone beyond the call of duty. Put ourselves on the line for someone else, and this is how they treat us.

Peter, the water walker. Peter, who said to Jesus , you are the Messiah. Peter, first into the tomb. Peter who denied Jesus three times prior to his death. In our story this morning, who

jumped into the water after Jesus was recognised as the man on the shore - it was Peter.

Peter, man of faith, insight, denial. Eager and impetuous, is the man challenged by Jesus. *"Simon, son of John, do you love me."* Come on Jesus, you have to be kidding me, you know that I do!

I wonder if the conversation between Peter and Jesus was in earshot of the other disciples. Peter, do you love me more than these other guys? *"You know that I love you."* Wait a minute, let's go back to the courtyard of the High priests house.

Snapshots:

¹⁷ *The girl at the gate said to Peter, "Aren't you also one of the disciples of that man?" "No, I am not," answered Peter. Strike one.*

²⁵ *Peter was still standing there keeping himself warm. So the others said to him, "Aren't you also one of the disciples of that man?" But Peter denied it. "No, I am not," he said. Strike two.*

²⁶ *One of the High Priest's slaves, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, spoke up. "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" he asked. ²⁷ Again Peter said "No"—and at once a rooster crowed. Strike three. You're out!*

It had been predicted by Jesus and I am sure denied by Peter. Others maybe, but not me. I will follow you to the end, no matter what. We have been there. Loyalty expressed, until

reality and humanity gets in the way and suddenly we realise, that in spite of our words, sincerely expressed, because at the time we meant every one of them, we don't follow through and someone is let down and we let ourselves down. We have all been there.

How did Peter feel? The denials were moments of deep anguish. Those denials would still have been fresh in his mind. Did those events of the courtyard go through his mind every night as he tried to sleep and, did he wish he could rewind the clock? How often have we wished that. To take back our words spoken in haste or in anger, or actions, taken without thought for someone else.

Every time he looked at Jesus, was Peter wondering what Jesus thought of him. Had his denial got back to Jesus? Only Luke places Jesus in the courtyard, he says, "*the Lord turned round and looked straight at Peter.*" When Jesus started to speak to him, was there a lump in his throat. Did his pulse start to race. Were there beads of sweat on his brow. "*Simon son of John, do you love me.*" Here goes. I am in for it now. Only, Jesus said to him, "*Take care of my lambs.*" Wait a minute. Jesus is asking me to be a shepherd. Rewind. For every denial, a declaration of love and in essence, forgiveness is offered to Peter. *Strike three, you're out. I forgive you.*

We have all been there. As Jesus already knew the real Peter, so he already knows the real us. We come complete with multiple

denials. They are inbuilt into our humanity and God knows that. We have been in that courtyard many times and said, *we do not know that man.* For each of our denials, Jesus says to us, do you love me? Take care of my sheep. We are all called to be shepherds.

I believe what Jesus is saying is, the 'currency' of loyalty is love. Jesus love to forgive our denials and, our love of him, that enables us to follow. It can't work any other way. Even when we stand in the courtyard of denial and Jesus looks straight at us, his gaze is one of compassion and forgiveness. When he speaks, it is not to condemn, but to ask, *do you love me?* His task, given to each one of us, is to be shepherds. He said, *Feed my sheep.*

Amen.