Communion

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0:00] Well, today, this morning, we will remember the death of Jesus as we gather at His table. And at the table we will be doing two things, or certainly two things that I want to stress or highlight, particularly this morning.

We will, on the one hand, be recognizing that we are frail sinners. We come as sinners. It is sinners who are invited to the table.
It is sinners who need to cling to Jesus and what He has done on behalf of sinners. It is sinners who will gather frail, weak sinners.
We will recognize that. Our coming to the table is a declaration of what we know to be true of ourselves. We sit at the table and declare, I am a sinner.
I am a frail, weak sinner. That is one thing that we will do. But we will also celebrate that in Jesus we have a fitting Savior.
[1:15] As sinners, we need a Savior. We need one who can forgive our sins. We need one who can rescue us, who can save us, who can redeem us from our sin and our guilt.

And as we gather at the table, we declare that Jesus is that Savior. We declare that He is our fitting and sufficient Savior.
And it is on these two truths that I want to reflect this morning in preparation for our participation in the Lord's Supper.
And we will do so with the help of the passage that we read that records the dialogue between Jesus and Peter, where Jesus anticipates Peter's denial, and where Peter protests that he will remain faithful.
If we can briefly imagine the scene before us, the Passover supper has concluded. Jesus, to the bemusement, I imagine, of His disciples, has broken the bread and declared, This is my body.
[2:31] He has taken the cup and declared, This is my blood of the covenant poured out for many. Together, they have sung the Hallel Psalms.

And now, perhaps still singing, We don't know exactly the order of events. They make their way to the Mount of Olives. On their way, or perhaps having arrived, Jesus broaches this solemn matter of their forthcoming denial.
And in the dialogue that follows, We are confronted with these two things that I have already introduced.
We are confronted with a frail sinner. And we are confronted with a fitting Savior. First of all, then, a frail sinner.
And we speak, of course, of Peter. What can we say about this frail sinner that in great measure is true of us also as frail sinners?
[3:42] I want to suggest three things that we can say. No doubt many more could be said. But three that I want to suggest this morning concerning this frail sinner.

First of all, he loves Jesus. He loves Jesus. Often the focus when this incident is considered, this occasion when Peter very seemingly, proudly declares his intention never to deny Jesus, often this incident is considered in the light of that foolish pride of Peter.
And we will come to that in a moment. But that is not where we should begin. Charity demands that we not begin there. But not only charity makes that demand.
Rather, we recognize, first of all, that this frail sinner loves Jesus. In the words of Peter, we find reflected a sincere love.
When Peter replies to Jesus' declaration that his flock will be scattered, he expresses himself in this way, even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.

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[5:05] This is a declaration of love. Regardless of what he subsequently does, this is a declaration of his sincere love for the Savior.

He goes on and declares the same again. Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. Now, we are familiar, of course, with the agonizing declaration of love at the time of Peter's restoration.
You know that I love you. You know all things. You know that I love you. But we also know that this love of Peter for Jesus did not begin following his resurrection.
It was not born after Jesus rose again. No, this love that Peter declares for Jesus was current here on this occasion when Jesus predicts Peter's denial.
He loves Jesus now. He loves Jesus at this moment that we are looking at this morning. And this is the reason for his declaration of loyalty, even in the face of possible death.
[6:24] Yes, Peter is a frail sinner, but he is a sinner who loves Jesus. And is that not true of us this morning as Christian people?

We are frail sinners, but we love Jesus. We love Jesus. That we can say. This is what unites us. We are of those who love Jesus. And yes, we recognize, we are very glad to recognize. We have no difficulty in recognizing that we love him because he first loved us.
But still, with Peter, we can declare that we love Jesus. Yes, a frail sinner, but one who loves Jesus. It's the first thing we can say.
But we can say also that Peter means well in what he says. We've already suggested that in the words that we shared with the children. Not only do we say that Peter loves Jesus, but we also say that his sincere intention is to be loyal to Jesus, even in the most trying and dangerous of circumstances.
[7:43] When Peter says, there in verse 33, I never will. I never will run. I never will let you down.

I will never be disloyal. He means it. He means it, I'm sure, from the bottom of his heart. It is his firm and decided intention to stick with Jesus, to follow Jesus, to be loyal to Jesus, to stand up for Jesus. Jesus. And he proves this to be so when just a couple of hours later a large crowd armed with swords and clubs appear.
You see, following this dialogue, or indeed, the occasion of the dialogue, the location of the dialogue is the Mount of Olives. Then we go on to read of Gethsemane and what occurs there.
And then, just in a few verses later, verse 47, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.
[8:58] And what does Peter do? What does Peter do when that happens? What does Peter do as said, I will never leave you. I will never abandon you. Even in the face of death, I will not abandon you.

Well, here death rears its ugly head. Here there is the threat of violence and death for Peter also. And what does Peter do? Does he run? No, he doesn't run. What does he do?
He draws his sword. And in doing so, and let us be very clear on this, in drawing his sword, Peter is signing his death warrant.
There is this large gathering of armed men. And Peter draws a sword. Now, who is going to win in that battle? Who is going to come out scot-free in that battle?
Well, it's very clear in the ordinary run of events who will die in that particular confrontation. Peter signs his death warrant.
[9:59] It is only the intervention of Jesus that saves Peter from arrest and, I would suggest, near certain death. This is what Peter does.

Now, was that a foolish act? Yes, it was a foolish act on the part of Peter. He is rebuked by Jesus for it, but it also serves as eloquent testimony to the sincerity of his intentions previously declared. When he declared, I will never leave you, I will never abandon you, even in the face of death, I will be there by your side. The truth of that, or the sincerity of it, is evidenced, is confirmed by what he does when this large crowd of men armed with sores and clubs appears on the horizon.
And I salute Peter for the sincerity of his intentions. I would seek, in some measure, to echo his words, even this morning, to declare to this Jesus whom I love, I will never disown you.
Certainly, that is the sincere desire of frail, forgiven sinners such as we are. Is that not your desire? Is it not your intention to serve Jesus faithfully?

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[11:24] Is it not your fixed purpose to be loyal to your Lord even in trying and difficult circumstances? We who gather at the table this morning are frail sinners who, like Peter, mean well.

Our heart is in the right place, and it's in the right place because the Lord himself has placed it in the right place. This frail sinner loves Jesus.
This frail sinner means well. But this frail sinner fails miserably. He fails miserably. Why does he fail miserably?
Why does he go on to do precisely what Jesus has indicated he will do and deny Jesus three times? Why does he fail in this way?
Well, no doubt a number of reasons could be identified, but I would suggest the following. There is, of course, as we've already suggested or hinted at, there is pride.
[12:31] The language of Peter that he uses here in this passage is very emphatic. I never will. And then in verse 35, it is particularly emphatic.

Indeed, Peter makes use of language in such a way that he makes it as emphatic as it possibly could be. Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.
Some versions say something along the lines, I will certainly never disown you. And the idea there is to try and capture the emphasis and the intensity of the original language, where Peter is declaring, under no circumstances, I will by no means disown you.
There is a great intensity and emphasis on the part of Peter concerning his declaration that he will not disown Jesus. And there is, of course, in that a measure of pride.
Peter is trusting in his own willpower. Or we might go further, or perhaps more accurately say that he is trusting in the power of his own love.
[13:47] You see, Peter is thinking, I love Jesus. And because I love him, I will not abandon him. And that's a reasonable line of thought, is it not? I love this man.

And because I love him, I couldn't abandon him. He's trusting in his own love. He's trusting in the depth of his own love as he understands it.
He also, carelessly and proudly, compares himself to others, his own friends and companions. Others may fall, but not me.
And there, the pride is more evident. Others, maybe. These other disciples, they may scatter. scatter. They may fall away, but not me.
We can make the same mistake. We may be less demonstrative in our protestations of love and loyalty.
[14:50] Peter, because he's Peter, because of the man he is, declares his loyalty in this very dramatic way. That may not be what we do.

But we can also be equally proud in trusting in our own strength to keep us standing, to keep us loyal to our Lord. There are ways that we can examine ourselves and identify if that is true of us.
If we are careless in prayer, then that is evidence of pride. That carelessness in prayer is to say, well, I don't need to pray. I don't need God's help. I don't need the Lord's strength to carry on.
I can do it in my own strength. And we, too, can be guilty of this same sin that Peter was guilty of that explains in a measure why he fails miserably.
There is pride. There is folly. Now, these things are not separate. They go together. Pride is itself. Foolishness.
[15:54] But we do see a step jump in his proud folly and stubbornness in his second protestation of untainted loyalty.

And there is a step jump in his folly because of the words that he hears before he protests for a second time. You see, in the first occasion when Jesus has quoted from the prophet Zechariah and has indicated that this is speaking of himself, that he will be struck and that his flock, the disciples, will be scattered.
Peter has understood this. And with that as a basis for his response, he then says, I never will.
Now, he was wrong to be so sure of himself on this first occasion, but there is a step jump in his folly when he goes on to say the very same thing, indeed in stronger language, when he has just heard from the mouth of Jesus the words recorded in verse 34, I tell you the truth.
Verily I say to you, Jesus deliberately and consciously wants his disciples to understand that what he is about to say is as true as true can be.
I tell you the truth this very night, Peter, before the cock crows, you will disown me three times.

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[17:25] And yet, having heard the words, perhaps he chose not to process the words, not to think much about them, but he heard the words.

He understood the meaning of the words. Having heard these very words, he foolishly goes on to declare, you're wrong, Jesus.
You're wrong. It's not as you think it will be. You're wrong. You say, I will fall, but you're wrong because I won't fall. And there is, of course, folly in Peter speaking in such a way.
There is pride, there is folly, and there is when the occasion of his denial takes place, and that's not our concern this morning, but there is fear.
When the time came, he was afraid. The profanity, the curses that came from his lips as he vehemently declared, I don't know the man.
[18:28] They were born of fear. And so, he failed. This frail sinner, this frail sinner who loves Jesus, this frail sinner who means well in his service for Jesus, he fails.

And he fails miserably as we also do. How do we understand this seeming contradiction? This man who loves Jesus, this man who means well, how can we understand that this man fails so miserably?
Well, it is the contradiction of being human. Our sincere and worthy emotions are tainted by sin. We are fallen men and women.
Sincere love and dismal failure coexist in our Christian experience. Genuinely sincere intentions prove very flimsy in the face of crisis and opposition.
Now, this is not to justify our sin, but simply to describe our condition. But notice one final commentary of Matthew that rings so true in this account that presents to us a frail sinner.
[19:51] Notice how the account ends at the close of verse 35. life. And all the other disciples said the same. And all the other disciples said the same.

They all loved. They all meant well. And they all failed miserably. we are those disciples.
We are those disciples. We are included in the all of Matthew's commentary. You and me this morning as we gather at the table, as we eat the broken body and drink the shed blood, we who gather are frail sinners as that Peter was.
And so, we stand in need of a fitting Savior. And the fitting Savior who is presented before us here in God's Word this morning.
A fitting Savior, Jesus. Fitting in what sense as revealed in this passage. I want to look at it in this manner. Fitting in what He knows, in what He did, and what He does.
[21:13] What does He know? Well, the passage reveals that He knows His Father's will. He knows that He, as the shepherd, must die for His sheep.

He knows this to be so in His condition as the eternal Son. He knows this to be so as He studies the Scriptures and finds His mission there described.
He knows His Father's will. But I want us to pause just for a moment and to consider what it is that He knows, as revealed by His quotation from Zechariah chapter 11.
You see, Jesus not only knows that He will die, but He knows who it is that will strike Him. Now, this is sacred ground, and we tread with tentative steps, but let's just read the passage there in Zechariah, just two or three verses, Zechariah chapter 11, as we consider who it is that will strike Jesus, and Jesus knows who the actor will be in His death.
In Zechariah chapter 11 and verse 15, we read, Then the Lord said to me, the prophet Zechariah is relating what it is, the Lord said to him, then the Lord said to me, take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd, for I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat their meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hooves.
[22:51] Woe to the worthless shepherd who deserts the flock. May the sword strike his arm and his right eye, may his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded. It's not my concern this morning to consider the if you wish the original reference here, but simply as this passage is used by Jesus himself in Matthew.

And the question is this, who is the one who will strike the shepherd? Well, in Zechariah, the one who orders the sword to strike the shepherd is the Lord. It is the Lord who is the actor, it is the Lord who will strike the shepherd.
shepherd. And so, as Jesus brings this passage, as he would apply this passage to his own situation, and as he declares there in verse 31, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd.

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Who is the eye of I will strike? It is God the Father. It is God the Father who will strike the shepherd. shepherd. This is what Jesus knows, what knowledge for him to bear as he makes his way to Calvary, that his own Father will be the one who will strike him.
He knows his Father's will. He knows also his disciples. His conviction concerning their imminent falling away is grounded in his own omniscience.
[24:37] It's grounded in his own infallible understanding and application of the prophetic scriptures, but it is also grounded in his knowledge of his disciples.

He knows his disciples. He doesn't know that they're going to fall away only because it's been prophesied, and he reads the prophecy, and he says, well, that must be true. Yes, that's so.
But he knows that they will fall away because he knows them. He knows what they're like. He knows their weakness. He knows them better than they know themselves. He knows that they are frail.
He knows that they are weak. And though their falling away grieves him deeply, it doesn't surprise him. It doesn't shock him because he knows them.
He knows each one of them. And he knows you. He knows us. He is a fitting Savior because of what he knows.
[25:38] But he is a fitting Savior also because of what he did. He not only knows his mission, he executes that mission. He hands himself over to death to be struck by the Father as the only and sufficient sacrifice for sin, for your sin and my sin.

And he rose again. In truth, what Jesus declares is that he will be raised. You see, in handing himself over to death as he does, his work is done.
And so he was able to declare from the cross, it is finished. His work is done. He has handed himself over to death. But though his work is done, there is still the work of the Father to raise him from the dead.
And was there any doubt, I wonder, in the mind of Jesus concerning the Father's vindication as would be declared by the resurrection? Well, it's impossible for us to follow his steps through the whole agony of his death and speculate as to how Jesus felt or what his convictions were, but certainly here, here there is no doubt in the mind of Jesus concerning the Father's vindication that will come following his death.
He states almost in a matter-of-fact way in verse 32, He is a fitting Savior because of what he did.
[27:30] But finally, he is a fitting Savior because of what he does. And here, my concern is to recognize the continuing work of Jesus on behalf of his flock.

And it is explicitly highlighted by Jesus in his words to his disciples there in verse 32, But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee. The shepherd who would die for his sheep has a continuing shepherding role.
Jesus does not do the main thing. He does not do the main thing in providing a way of forgiveness and salvation and then take a step back and say to his disciples, well, you get on with it now.
No, his permanent concern is to go before his disciples. Just for a moment, think of these disciples following the death of Jesus.
What a turnaround for them. They had anticipated when Jesus had died and he'd been buried, they had anticipated heading disconsolately to Galilee, leaving behind in Jerusalem the corpse of their master.
[28:39] But now, they will discover that he is already there ahead of them, just as he had said it would be so. I will go ahead of you into Galilee.

I will continue shepherding you. And nothing has changed. Yes, this morning we particularly look back on what Jesus has done. What he has done.
The salvation that he has secured is done. But we also remember that Jesus today is our shepherd. He continues to go on ahead of his people, leading the way. And so we have in Jesus. So we find, as Jesus is presented to us here in this passage, we find a fitting Savior.
We are frail sinners, but we have a fitting Savior. And so let us gather round the table in that confidence.
[29:41] Let us pray. good of that right here we have schedule.

We have to have Jah that we readily we have guys seen,

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