

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Trustworthy

Betrayed and Denied

(John 18:1-27)

Study #9

Introduction: Caught in the grip of God's loving plan...

In the past, I've made the point that icebergs moving through Arctic or Antarctic waters give a good picture of Jesus, as He resolutely made His way to the cross.

We can pair the movement of Jesus with the movement of icebergs because He was and icebergs are driven forward by both visible forces and by even more powerful, invisible forces.

Icebergs will often move contrary to strong surface winds because they are caught in the grip of stronger ocean currents that carry them forward, no matter how strong the surface winds.

In the same way, today, we see Jesus, facing strong winds of opposition, betrayal, injustice, and denial and still steadily moving toward the cross. He was carried along by the twin currents of His own commitment to His Father's will and His own deep love for us.

Last Sunday, we looked at the anointing of Jesus by Mary, the Jewish rulers' plot to kill the alive-again Lazarus, and Jesus' triumphal entry on Palm Sunday.

Following all of that, Jesus gave final instructions to His apostles in an upstairs room in Jerusalem, instructions that we'll be looking at later in April.

But this morning, we catch up to Jesus and the eleven in the Garden of Gethsemane, a secluded orchard¹ on the slopes of the Mount of Olives.²

Jesus - Betrayed by Judas (18:1-8a)

The Place of Jesus' Arrest (18:1-3)

[18:1] When Jesus had spoken these words, He went away with his disciples across the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden which He entered with His disciples.³

I am told that from this garden, you can look west across the Kidron Valley and see the city of Jerusalem.

And, while we may or may not know the exact location of the garden, Jesus' disciples all knew.⁴ John made sure that we knew that one of them, in particular, knew.

[2] Now Judas, who was betraying Him, also knew the place; because Jesus had often met there with His disciples.

The key thing was that Judas knew that this place was the place to find Jesus.

¹ The word "gethsemane" means "olive press" in Hebrew.

² We note how many events of Jesus' final hours are omitted by John, such as. (1). Peter and Jesus locking eyes after Peter's denials; (2) Peter's remorse over denying Jesus; (3) the Lord's Supper; (4) Jesus sweating and praying in the Garden; (5)

Judas' kiss in the Garden. Each Gospel writer recorded the events leading up to Jesus' death he did to focus on different facets of His sacrificial love for us.

³ The path they followed crossed a dry riverbed (dry, except during the heavy rains of the winter months) called the Kidron.

⁴ Jesus and His disciples may have stayed here during the annual Jewish festivals (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles) as none of them had a home in the city.

Putting that knowledge to use, Judas brought a crowd with him to the Garden with the clear intention of betraying Jesus.

On this night, this garden was packed.

Jesus and His eleven faithful disciples were there, plus Judas, plus, **[3]...the Roman cohort⁵ and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees...**⁶

The torchlight and lanterns they brought would have lent an ominous sense to the night scene. Added to that, John tells us that those with Judas came armed with weapons.⁷

When they arrived, there was what I envision an awkward face-off. Jesus broke the ice, took the first step, made the first move.

Knowing full well why they were there, He asked, anyway.

Judas Identified Jesus...Jesus Identified Himself (18:4-8a)

Jesus broke the ice (vv. 4-6)

[4] Jesus therefore, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, came out into the open and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?"

I'm guessing that Jesus speaking first surprised the group of leaders and soldiers. They were probably expecting to arrest a scared Jewish peasant.

That doesn't at all describe the Man they found. With Jesus, there was no hint of fear - or resistance.

[5a] They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene"...[5c] And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them.

Judas was central to the rulers' scheme to arrest Jesus. Judas was there to identify Jesus for them in the pitch black darkness of the middle of the night.

The Lord didn't keep them in suspense.

[5b] He said to them, "I am He."

His answer said more than, "That would be Me." He said, "**I AM**" - and that phrase packed a wallop with the Jews.

Earlier in John's Gospel, in referring to Himself, Jesus said, **[John 8:58] "Before Abraham was born, I AM."**

Those listening to Him then knew exactly what He was saying. He was claiming to be God in the flesh, the great "**I AM**" (Jehovah!) of the Old Testament. That's why they picked up stones to kill Him for blasphemy.

That's why we read this, here: **[6] Now then, when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back, and fell to the ground.**

The mob in the garden knew what Jesus was claiming. But they quickly regained their composure, got up, and brushed themselves off.

Jesus identified Himself - again (vv. 7-8a)

[7] He then asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." [8a] Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He"

⁵ A cohort consisted of six hundred men, not that all of these soldiers were present in the garden. The arrest of Jesus was the result of a combined effort of Jews and Gentiles.

⁶ Pilate would have had to have been aware of the movement of this many troops in Jerusalem. He must have given his approval for Jesus' arrest.

⁷ Historians tell us that the only times there were Roman soldiers at the temple were during feast times, when they were in place to quell riots. The soldiers went to the garden to avoid just that sort of scene when they arrested Jesus.

Those who didn't know Jesus were now certain that THIS was Jesus.

And we, who are familiar with Jesus, aren't surprised at what Jesus did next.

Jesus' Love; Peter's Recklessness (12:8b-11)

Jesus Protected His Sheep as Peter Lashed Out (18:8b-10)

[8b]...“so if you are seeking Me, let these men go on their way.” [9] This took place so that the word which He spoke would be fulfilled: “Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one.”

He was being arrested, put in custody of the people who would see to it that He was crucified...and He protected His sheep. That's just what we would expect from the Good Shepherd.

But sadly, fulfilling His request that the soldiers “*let these men go*” got difficult because of the actions of the impulsive Simon Peter.

[10] Then Simon Peter, since he had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus.

Peter was using was the ancient equivalent of a Saturday night special. It was the *maxaira*, a short sword, about a foot or so long.

Peter probably brought the dagger with him to the garden because he suspected that there would be trouble.

When he realized what was happening, he pulled the dagger out and lunged at the high priest's slave.⁸

⁸ Some think that Peter was trying to slit the high priest's servant's ear to humiliate the high priest, since men with shredded ears were disqualified from priestly service. This is highly unlikely. As Leon Morris writes in his commentary: The ear is a small target, and Peter was not an expert swordsman. More likely, he struck out wildly in the direction of the head, and in the uncertain light hit only the ear.

It's clear from what follows that Jesus wasn't impressed. At the same time, I think Peter was out to prove to Jesus his loyalty.⁹

So, what do we say about Peter and what he did here?

On the one hand, Peter clearly didn't “get” what was happening, that Jesus' arrest was all a part of a plan that had been forming over the course of the last three years - and from eternity past.

None of the disciples understood. But since Peter was the only one who did something, we scrutinize Peter.

He hadn't been listening very well when Jesus told the group several times that He would be arrested, beaten, turned over to the Gentiles, and crucified.

He didn't get it, so he lopped off the right ear of the high priest's slave at the first sight of trouble.

On the other hand...

Peter was a fisherman. I doubt if he knew much about sword play. It was night and torches were blazing. There was a lot of tension.

Plus, soldiers of the most powerful empire in the world - Rome - were standing before him. So were the most powerful religious figures in Israel - chief priests and scribes - standing before him.

They were all arrayed against Jesus - and Peter acted. He did something he thought would help his Savior-Friend.

Misguided? Sure. Rash? No doubt. Courageous? Yes. Loyal? Yes.

⁹ Jesus made statements that Peter might have taken to mean he was to use the sword. For instance, ***[Matthew 10:34] “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”***; or ***[Luke 22:36]...“But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his cloak and buy one.”***

Jesus wasn't the only one in the Garden not thinking about Himself. Peter saw Jesus in trouble, and he jumped in front of the bus to push Him out of the way.

I'm not saying that Peter didn't make a mistake. He made a mistake.

The other apostles didn't make the mistake Peter made of using a sword. They didn't do anything. I'm not sure that's any better.

Jesus confirmed that Peter made a mistake by correcting him.¹⁰

Jesus' Rebuke...Jesus' Steadfastness (18:11)

[11a] So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath"

Peter acted impetuously. Loyal. Leaning on his own understanding. Ignorantly. Courageously. Peter was all over the place.

And Jesus?

[11b]... "the cup which the Father has given Me, am I not to drink it?"

Like an iceberg facing strong headwinds, He kept moving against the wind because He was caught in the grip of the current of God's commission for Him and His love for us.

He wasn't looking for an escape or for a rescue. The Father had given Him a hard cup to swallow. He'll drink it down to the dregs.

It looked, though, to an observer, that things were unravelling. If there had ever been a time when Jesus' sovereign authority might have been questioned, it was here.

At this moment, things look darker than they ever have. He's been betrayed. His leading apostle went off script. The apostles will all soon run off into the dark.

That is why John had to let us know that Jesus...
...purposefully went off to the garden. (v. 1)
...knew what was about to happen. (v. 4)
...is the **"I AM."** (v. 5)
...chose to drink the Father's cup. (v. 8)

Jesus knew exactly what He was doing. He had lived with exactly this on His radar. He embraced it.¹¹

And we watch as He was hauled away to the next indignity.

Transition: Jesus was taken to Annas (18:12-14)

[12] So the Roman cohort, the commander, and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him, [13] and brought Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.

According to the Old Testament, a high priest was high priest for life.

But, by Jesus' day, a high priest served only a year or at the most a few years. Rome had seen the wisdom of replacing a high priest every year or so to keep one man from becoming too powerful.

Caiaphas was the officially recognized high priest, but his father-in-law, Annas, was still also called "high priest." And John thought it was worthwhile to mention Caiaphas' dubious claim to fame.

end. That was the point Joseph made in Genesis 50, after his brothers sold him into Egyptian slavery. He told them, *"You meant it for evil; God meant it for good."* Such is the case, too, with the cross and everything that led up to it. God used even the betrayal by Judas to accomplish His plan of bringing salvation to all who would believe in His Son.

¹⁰ Luke tells us that He touched Malchus' ear and healed him - Luke 22:52.

¹¹ One of the most powerful aspects of history is God's willingness to use even human evil to accomplish His purposes. It is never the case that God Himself is involved with the evil, is implicated in it, or causes it. But His wisdom, power, and goodness are so great that He can take anything people can do and turn it to a good

[14] Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was in their best interest for one man to die in behalf of the people.

To this point, Jesus had not experienced the worst of His sufferings. It will get much worse. Still, the last few hours would have been tough.

He was handed over to those who hated Him by Judas, a man into whom He had invested three years of His life.

He was arrested by a combination of Jews (His own people) and Romans. He would have had every reason to see this and think, rightly, *“The whole world is against Me.”*

Already, the ball is rolling, events are falling into place, the cross is now inevitable.

He was about to be interrogated by Annas. And as that was about to begin, John brings us into the continuing saga of Peter, who was determined to keep up with Jesus after the arrest in the Garden.¹²

Jesus - Denied By Peter (18:13-27)

Setting the Stage: Peter and John Follow Jesus (18:15-16)

[15] Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, [16] but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in.

Peter wanted to be near Jesus. And, while *“the other disciple”* wasn’t named, John was undoubtedly referring to himself.¹³

¹² John uses the literary device of *interchange* in chapter 18 (switching back and forth between the primary subjects: 1-9 - Jesus; 10-11 - Peter; 12-14 - Jesus; 15-18 - Peter; 19-24 - Jesus; 25-27 - Peter; 28ff - Jesus) to emphasize Peter’s instability and Jesus’ rock-solid (or iceberg-solid) steadfastness.

Peter wanted to see what was going on with Jesus, and John had an inside track to get him to where Jesus was.¹⁴

John got permission to bring Peter inside the courtyard of the high priest and that let’s us move to the first act of a three-act tragedy.

It all began with an innocent question from a woman who was standing around outside with Peter.

Peter’s Denials, Round One (18:17-18)

An innocent question for Peter (v. 17a)

[17a] Then the slave woman who was the doorkeeper said to Peter, “You are not also one of this Man’s disciples, are you?”

Now, that question expected a negative answer.

To have claimed to have been Jesus’ disciple would have meant contradicting the spirit of the question.

For Peter, here, to refuse to identify with Jesus, was, in a way, kinda-sorta little more than just not looking for trouble.

And after that scuffle in the Garden of Gethsemane, Simon Peter definitely wasn’t looking for any more trouble on this night.

Peter denied (v. 17b)

[17b] He said, “I am not.”

He could have repeated Jesus and simply said, *“I am.”* Not meaning what Jesus meant, of course, but clearly claiming to be Jesus’ disciple. But he didn’t do that.

¹³ John never does refer to himself by name in this Gospel.

¹⁴ In his commentary, Leon Morris proposes that John may have been a priest before he became one of Jesus’ disciples by looking at genealogical references in Mark 15:40, John 19:25, and Luke 1:36 and 1:5.

I don't think that Peter has here and now ceased to be Jesus' disciple. He suffered a failure of nerve in a stress-filled moment.

But he hadn't taken seriously Jesus' clear warning, earlier in the evening, that he - Peter! - would deny Him. He defaulted to following the path of least resistance and failed in a moment of testing.

It is painful to read this because we've all come to love and enjoy Peter. There's nothing enjoyable about this. His failure was ugly.

And John gives us a glimpse of the physical setting.

Everyone was warming themselves by the fire (v. 18)

[18] Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.

It was evidently a chilly night, being early spring. So, those who had been following the events of the night had built up a fire and were warming themselves by it.¹⁵

And there was Peter right there with the rest of them, trying to blend in with the others. Inside, the trial before Annas had started.

(Parenthetical: Annas Condemned Jesus (18:19-24))

Jesus on the hot seat (vv. 19-21)

[19] The high priest [Annas] then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching.

It is ironic that Jewish and Roman law are the foundational cornerstones of our Western judicial policy. But in the case of the trials of Jesus, both systems were guilty of serious injustices.

The first legal breach was that the trial was held at night. That was strictly forbidden under Jewish law.¹⁶

In response to the questions Annas was asking, Jesus reminded Annas of how openly He had taught.

[20] Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple area, where all the Jews congregate; and I said nothing in secret. [21] Why are you asking Me? Ask those who have heard what I spoke to them. Look: these people know what I said."

Jesus had no "secret teachings." But one of the officers of the High Priest didn't take kindly to Jesus' answer.

A response to Jesus' words (vv. 22-23)

[22] But when He said this, one of the officers, who was standing nearby, struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?"

Here is another legal breach - he was hit.

That should never happen in our own day, and it shouldn't have happened to Jesus when He was on trial before the Jewish high priest.

Jesus didn't retaliate. But He didn't wilt, either.

[23] Jesus answered him, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?'

It took guts to say that.

We don't know how long this sham of a trial lasted. Probably not very long. Annas had soon had all of Jesus he wanted, so he moved Jesus to the next phase of His trials and sent Him, bound, to Caiaphas.

¹⁵ I enjoy sitting in front of a fire in my backyard chimenea on cold mornings, like this past Tuesday when it was in the mid-thirty's.

¹⁶ Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:1 - a text that guided Jewish courts; not part of Scripture.

We'll see that phase of the trials of Jesus next Sunday. For now, we continue with the trials of Simon Peter.

I assume that a couple of hours have passed since Peter's first denial. We return to the courtyard and find Peter and the rest still warming themselves by the fire on that chilly night.

And, while Jesus was moved from wherever Annas was to wherever Caiaphas was,¹⁷ Peter was still in the same place, still surrounded by slaves and officers.

This time, several of those standing there spoke to Peter.

Peter's Denials, Rounds Two and Three (18:25-27)

Peter's second denial (v. 25)

[25a] Now Simon Peter was still standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not one of His disciples as well, are you?"

Again, like the first question, this one expected a negative response. And, again, this question was whether Peter was one of Jesus' disciples or not.

Peter had set a precedent by his first answer and dug deeper into that rut.

[25b] He denied it, and said, "I am not."

For the second time we hear Peter's firm ***"I am not"*** who you say I am; ***"I am not"*** who I have claimed to be; ***"I am not"*** who I aspire to be.

That, in contrast to Jesus' courageous ***"I AM"*** exactly who I have always claimed to be; ***"I AM"*** exactly who I have always been.

There is no sugarcoating this. We don't have to like it. We do have to see it for what it is. And it is not over.

After what I assume was a brief passage of time, another one of those standing by the fire got a fresh - maybe a closer - look at Peter.

This view brought to mind someone this slave had seen earlier in the Garden of Gethsemane when Peter's face was lit by torchlight.

Peter's third denial (vv. 26-27a)

[26] One of the slaves of the high priest, who was related to the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?"

This person had a vested interest in finding out who Peter was. Peter hurt a member of his family. Maybe he wanted revenge. His question was pointed. Sharp.

He didn't ask about Peter's relationship to Jesus as a disciple. It was a simple question of presence. *"Were you there with that Jesus guy in the garden?"*

I keep hoping that some year I will come to this text and Peter will look that person straight in the eye and make a clear confession: *"Yes, I was there. And, yes, you saw me. And yes, I am Jesus' disciple!"*

But, of course, that never happens.

[27a] Peter then denied it again.

Peter had already denied being Jesus' follower twice tonight. Now, he has gone so far as to say that he was not even in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus.

The first two statements were denials of relationship and commitment. This third is a denial of hard facts - an out and out lie.

¹⁷ The two places were evidently close, as Jesus and Peter locked eyes after Peter's third denial and the rooster crowed. (Luke 22:61)

By this time, of course, Peter's brain was fully in gear. If he could have blamed his first denial on an unthinking reaction under stress, he can't do that anymore. He has committed to denial as a way of dealing with these questions.

And then, just as he concluded this final statement, this third denial, there was a silence in the Garden, a silence was broken by a familiar morning sound.

[27b]...and immediately a rooster crowed.¹⁸

Jesus had earlier told Peter that before the rooster crowed, he would deny Him three times. (John 13:36-38) At that point, earlier in the evening, Peter didn't believe it. He was too strong.

He was willing to die for Jesus. But now it has happened. It was a miserable failure.

And, as the other Gospel records make clear, Peter was reduced to self-reproach, self-disgust, and tears.

John, who was the only one of the four Gospel writers to witness the whole sad event, maybe out of kindness, didn't even mention Peter's anguish.

Conclusion:

As we close, let's first consider Peter.

It isn't every year that we take a close look at Simon Peter's three denials as we have today. But it is good that we have done that today.

Christ-followers fail. It happens.

If you are a Christ-follower, get used to the idea that you will, from time to time, stumble. Nobody gets it right all the time.

Sometimes we say things we wish we hadn't said or do things we later realize weren't wise or loving.

We begin things we don't finish. We make decisions we'd love to undo, behave as we wish we hadn't. We long for a do-over.

Peter's story is my story and Peter's story is your story, too.

The good news is that a failure isn't fatal for a Jesus follower.

We will soon watch Jesus correct and restore Simon Peter. Peter became more powerful for Jesus after his failure.

Jesus will do the same with you.

My prayer is that each of us here today will take heart from the story of Peter. He's a living, breathing example of a disciple whom God was willing to use despite failure. (That's the only kind of disciple Jesus has access to...)

Jesus' passion is to use us, despite weaknesses, to bring beauty out of the ashes of failure, to do something redemptive out of our sin.

He wants us to come back to Him, confess our sin and let Him wash our feet again so that He can put us back into the game, heal us so that the place where we are broken becomes doubly strong, and create out of us trophies of His amazing grace.

Now, let's end by seeing Jesus.

Suppose we flip the script this year and imagine a scenario in which Judas didn't betray and the soldiers didn't arrest Jesus. Instead, when He said, "**I AM**" - they believed and worshiped.

¹⁸ The other gospels record Peter's response once he realizes what he has done in denying Jesus: [Matthew 26:75] *And he went out and wept bitterly.*; [Mark 12:72] *And he hurried out and began to weep.*; [Luke 22:61-62] *And then the Lord*

turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times." [62] And he went out and wept bitterly.

Annas believed, as did Caiaphas and the rest of the Sanhedrin.

Imagine all of these recognizing their sin and their need for a Savior. Picture them bowing before Jesus and humbly begging Him to offer Himself as a sacrifice for them on a Roman cross.

Think of how it would have changed things for Jesus if Jesus was dying for people who were for Him, who believed in Him, who knew they had a need that only He could meet.

His death on the cross would still be ghastly and painful, but He would have had the comfort of knowing their gratitude.

But that is not at all what happened.

Judas did betray. And Peter did lash out with his sword. The soldiers did arrest and bound Him and hauled Him to Annas where He was interrogated, blasphemed, and slapped.

And Peter did deny Jesus three times.

On this night, all Jesus encountered was opposition, hardship, and suffering. Jesus willingly died for those who hated Him and were ashamed of Him.

Today, John has let us see some of the forces arrayed against Jesus and Jesus' indomitable will to press on toward the cross, despite those forces.

We worship a Savior whose love for us and whose submission to the will of His Father was so complete that nothing could deter Him from His mission to seek and to save that which is lost.