

Rev. Dan Welch Midweek in Lent 4 3-30-22 Text- Matthew 26:69-75  
Week 4: The Courtyard

Noel Coward, a famous British playwright who died in 1973, once played a joke on twenty of the most famous men in London. He sent all twenty men an identical note that read: “Everybody has found out what you have done. If I were you, I would get out of town.” What did all twenty men do? All twenty men got out of town!

What if you opened your mail one day and found such a note? “Everybody has found out what you have done. If I were you, I would get out of town!” What would race through your mind? The income you hid from the IRS? All the time at work you spent playing video games? The candy bar you stole from the store as a kid? The expense account you inflated? It’s called the g-word. G-word? Guilt! Sometimes guilt can sit on our chest like a concrete block until we feel sick—sick enough to die!

Maybe there’s someone on the planet who hasn’t known guilt or who hasn’t at some point in their life felt the crushing weight of regret and remorse, but I’ve never met that person. What sucked you under? A time when you really lost your temper? A youthful indiscretion? Or maybe your guilt isn’t the result of a moment but of a whole season in life. You failed as a parent. You squandered your youth or your money—or both. The result? Guilt!

We’re in a series in Matthew called Places of the Passion. Today we journey to a Courtyard in Jerusalem—the Courtyard of a high priest named Caiaphas. In Caiaphas’ courtyard we see guilt—Peter’s guilt and our own guilt. Beyond the courtyard we see grace—grace for Peter and grace for us.

To get the context, we rewind the tape and go back to Gethsemane. First comes the Claim. “Peter answered him, ‘Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.’ Peter said to him, ‘Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!’”  
(Matthew 26:33–34)

Jesus and Peter had been through so much together. Three years earlier, Jesus was walking on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus sees Peter fishing with his brother Andrew and calls them to follow. “I will

make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19). Peter and Andrew follow. One day, about a year later, Peter follows Jesus out onto the Sea of Galilee during a huge storm. Peter walks on the water, but then he begins to sink. Jesus immediately reaches out His hand, takes hold of Peter, and saves him.

At Caesarea Philippi, Peter says to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16) After that, Jesus takes Peter—along with James and John—to see His glory on the Mt. of Transfiguration. Then Jesus invites this same trio to witness His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. No wonder Peter makes the claim, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!”

But we’ve all made that claim. On the day we were Confirmed in church the pastor asked us, “Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed remain true to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?” We said, “I do!” When we got married, the pastor asked, “Will you take this man to be your wedded husband?” You women said, “I do!” “Will you take this woman to be your wedded wife?” We men said, “I do!” The claim. The claim? That’s easy.

Next, after the claim, come the Cracks. As the events in the courtyard unfold, it’s like watching cracks in a house’s foundation slowly spread. A servant girl comes up to Peter and says, “You were with Jesus the Galilean.” Peter denies it, saying, ‘I don’t know what you mean.’” (Matthew 26:70) The first crack.

Peter then goes out to the courtyard’s entrance when another servant girl sees him. She says to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” Again, Peter denies it. Only this time with an oath: “I don’t know the man.” (Matthew 26:72) The second crack.

When there are enough cracks, there will always be a ***collapse***. Always!

The Collapse. “After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, ‘Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.’ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, ‘I don’t know the man.’” (Matthew 26:73–74) We know from first-century documents that the Jews in Galilee spoke a different dialect of Aramaic. It’s like when we hear someone talking who is from the deep South. Peter’s accent betrayed him.

What does Peter do? The expression “invoke a curse on himself” is where we get the English word anathematize. Anathematize means “be eternally condemned.” Paul uses the same word in Galatians 1:8, 9. “If anyone preaches a different Gospel to you let him be anathematized—eternally condemned.” Peter would rather be condemned than admit he knows Jesus.

First comes Peter’s evasive denial. Then comes Peter’s *direct* denial—on oath. Now comes Peter’s *curse*. What’s next? The rooster crowed.

The collapse. For us it happens when we say, “Just one more drink.” Or, “just one more lie.” Or, “just one more fling.” Or, “just one more look.” Crack. Crack. Crack. But one more leads to one more, and then just one more. When there are enough cracks, there will always be a collapse. Always! Then what? Enter the G-word. The G-word? Guilt!

Then what are our options? Numb it with a drink during happy hour. Numb it through binge shopping; binge internet games; binge eating; binge drinking; binge TV watching.

Deny it. Pretend the rooster never crowed. Concoct a plan to cover it all up. One lie, though, leads to another lie, then to another lie. Before long we have to adjust the second lie to align with the first lie, then the third lie to align with the second lie. Numb it. Deny it.

Bury it. Bury your guilt beneath a mountain of work and a calendar of appointments. The busier we stay, the less time we have to spend with that one person we have come to dislike the most—ourselves.

Punish it. Cut ourselves. Flog ourselves. If not with whips then with rules. Create a long list of things to do. Pray more! Study more! Show up earlier and stay up later.

Minimize it. We didn’t sin, we just lost our way. We didn’t sin, we just got caught up in the moment. We didn’t sin, we just took the wrong path. Redirect it. Lash out at the kids. Lash out at your spouse, your coworkers, your cat, your dog, the other drivers on the road—whoever!

Offset it. Build the perfect family. Create the perfect career. Score perfect grades. And be completely intolerant of mistakes by yourself or other people.

Guilt—the G-word—turns us into miserable, weary, angry, duplicitous, stressed-out people. Guilt sucks the life right out of us. Grace restores it. Grace?

How does that happen? The Confession. “Peter went out and wept bitterly.” (Matthew 26:75) Peter didn’t numb his guilt. Deny it. Bury it. Punish it. Minimize it. Redirect it. Offset it. Peter **confessed** his guilt. Period.

While Peter went outside the courtyard to confess, Jesus went to the cross to die. Jesus doesn’t wait until we get it all together. Jesus doesn’t wait until we overcome our temptations and fight our demons and conquer our sin. Paul says in Romans 5:8, “God shows his love for us in this—while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” In our courtyard, we see guilt. Beyond our courtyard—at the cross—we see **grace**. And grace means what?

The Come Back. Who preaches the sermon on Pentecost? Peter. Whose sermon converts 3,000 people? Peter. Who writes two books in the New Testament? Peter. Listen closely. Come backs don’t depend on how much we love Jesus. Come backs depend on how much Jesus loves us. Come backs don’t depend on what we do for Jesus. Come backs depend on what Jesus does for us. Come backs don’t depend upon us giving our life for Jesus. Come backs depend on Jesus giving His life for us.

Our story isn’t over when Jesus is in it. Isn’t that great? Our story isn’t over when Jesus is in it. We can all comeback from guilt. How? The best G-Word of all. Grace. Amen.