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April 2, 2015  
Newark, Delaware

Maundy Thursday

Matthew 26: 20-30  
John 18 & 19 (selected verses)

### “Owning Up”

Owning-up ... that means, recognize personal failure ... and make amends.

Owning up means transform your approach...always on the side of loving God with heart soul, strength and mind ... and our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Peter follows Jesus so passionately. And other times he fails miserably. At times Peter is so full of courage and bravado. And at other times, you might call him “coward”.

In that night-time confrontation in the garden Peter is impulsive—certainly eager to defend Jesus. Peter lashes out, maybe as a way to own up to his allegiance to Jesus, to be clear about/to prove that he is for Jesus 100%. So Peter with his sword, goes after the high priest’s slave and cuts off part of his ear. But it’s not exactly the right move. Jesus instructs, “Peter, put your sword away.”

Just a little while later, in the courtyard, three separate times, Peter denies knowing Jesus. He turns away to the comfort of the fire and stands there, warming his hands. “I never knew the man,” he insists. So then and there, in the rush of just a few verses, three times, Peter absolutely refuses to own up to who he is. “Really, honestly, I am ... well, I have been a dear friend of Jesus.”

It’s surprising, the way Peter responds to the forces coming at him from all directions. Each time Peter reacts and mirrors the people confronting him. Peter mirrors their anger, their disappointment, their frustration, their intensifying rage.

And every one of the participants that hideous day can look at Jesus, how he reacts, what Jesus says, and his actions and his words become like a mirror for them.

There, in Jesus, **is pure truth.**

In that mirror of Jesus, **is reflected pure goodness.**

Every one of the participants in these scenes can see in the reflection how **far off** each of them is from Goodness. From Truth.

Jesus mirrors that to them. They see themselves in the truth of what Jesus reflects to them. Yet they plunge forward, destined for destruction ... for Jesus? For themselves?

One way we Christians avoid seeing our own reflection in the mirror is to pretend that this is a story about Romans and Jews. As long as they remain the villains, then we are off the hook—or so we think.

Unfortunately, however, this is not a story that happened long ago in a land far away. . . . Rather, this is a story that happens anywhere and at any time, and we are as likely to be the **offenders** as we are the **victims**.

No doubt few of us will suppose ourselves to be Caiaphas, or Pilate. Yes, they were the ones who gave Jesus the death sentence, but a large part of Jesus had already died before Caiaphas and Pilate had ever gotten to him.

The part that Judas killed off,  
then Peter,  
then all those who fled.

...Those are the characters with our names on them—  
not Jesus' enemies, but Jesus' friends

This day of betrayal and mocking ...is filled with deepening darkness and challenges us to find the courage to look honestly at ourselves.

How do I rate what kind of friend I am to Jesus?

How do I rate my loyalty and allegiance?

When do I own up to who he is in my life,  
and when do I choose to simply warm  
my hands by the fire instead—and to  
remain comfortable? At a distance.

The darkness of these days is not only focused on our personal journeys. The darkness extends beyond us.

Innocent people are being killed for the sake of one nation or another.

Or most terribly, one religion or another.

Good and faithful people speak their truth and do their deeds, yet what they say or what they do is twisted by the media or the politicians or the pundits to deride or to advance their own causes— to improve TV ratings, to go viral, to sell papers, to win political elections.

I've come to think that one reason for our reticence to own up to our allegiance to Jesus has to do with us not wanting to be identified with the faith that has been defined and reduced by the media and the politicians to what they scornfully name to be politically correct. To be what is socially acceptable. To be what is culturally suitable. Oh my, so much to the contrary!

You and I know the many ways we avoid owning up to our allegiance to the God we know in Jesus Christ.

The comfort of the fire is an attraction.

It feels good to stand in the crowd and warm up our hands with like-minded people.

Fear of being wrong is another.

Another, fear of looking foolish.

There are a thousand ways to avoid owning up to Jesus, some of them, as obvious as choosing where we will stand when in a conflict between the weak and the strong, others of them harder to detect—like keeping our mouths shut when someone asks us if we know him, or if we trust him.

And we fail to own up by not following that internal nudge that we have come to recognize as God's nudge...prompting us to faithfulness ... to truth ... to justice.

This evening, between now and Sunday, measure your friendship with Jesus.

Ask yourself how well you own up to knowing him...following him.

Today – tomorrow while he dies, do not turn away.

Make yourself look in the mirror. In these holy days no one gets away without being humbled

by his beauty.

These days no one flees without being illumined by his light.

And then, come Sunday, Easter, believe the unbelievable. Trust that no sin or failing or turning away or denial can overcome the loving forgiveness that the risen Christ has for you and for me and for the world. And be in Peace. And go in Peace.