

Questions for Lent
#5 Will You Lay Down Your Life For Me?

John 13: 31-38

There is a little church on the Appian Way not far from the city Rome that bears the interesting name "**The Church of the Quo Vadis**". Those Latin words, *Quo Vadis* means *whither goest thou?* A beautiful legend recounts that a few years after the crucifixion of Jesus, Peter had been in Rome and was under the threat of persecution. He was fleeing the city in fear, when he met Jesus. Jesus was headed into the city, so Peter asked Him the question "**Lord, whither goes thou?**" The Master answered: "**I go to Rome, to be crucified again.**"

The legend asserts that this answer so pierced the heart of Peter that it transformed a cowardly fugitive into a hero, and he turned to follow his Lord back into Rome, where he gladly died.

This chapel was built on the Appian Way, at the spot where a fleeing Peter met the Risen Lord coming back into the city. He asked the Lord *Quo Vadis*, "*whither goest thou?*"

It is just a legend. I share it with you today because the question that Peter asked the Lord is the same question he asked Him in our Scripture lesson. Jesus was talking to his disciples about His approaching death, and His "going away". Peter didn't understand so he asked Jesus, "**Where are you going?**" Jesus told him he couldn't go with Him.

In the incident, we see all of the fascinating personality characteristics of Simon Peter. His eagerness to be in front, his habit of blurting out his thoughts and feelings, his passionate love for his master, and his inability to understand Jesus as well as his self-confident arrogance. If you follow the reading of the Scripture attentively, you will notice that Peter has interrupted Christ's teaching, entirely deaf to their full meaning. He blindly picks up the single thought, that Jesus is departing leaving him, Peter - alone. So he blurts out the question, "**Lord! Whither goest thou?**" – seemingly unaware of the obvious answer implied in his question. "**Tell me where, and then I will come too**"; pledging to follow faithfully, as a dog behind his master, wherever he went.

Jesus understood all of that, because He knows what is in the minds and hearts of people. So He

laid that tough question on Peter: ***"Will you lay down your life for me?"*** It is the commitment question.

Can there be any tougher question asked of a disciple than that -- will you lay down you life for me? The question not only pierces the shallow thinking of Peter, it is the commitment question for all of us. It is relevant for us today, especially relevant as we are moving rapidly toward Holy Week and the vivid memory of Jesus' passion and death.

I'd like us to come at that question one step at a time in order to capture the full meaning of it and struggle with integrity for an answer. In my struggle with it, I've shaped three other questions. As we answer these questions, we will be responding to the commitment question that Jesus confronts each of us.

I. Will you make my will your will? That will help us get at the more piercing commitment question - - will you lay down your life for me.

A noted theologian tells of a visit he once had with Mahatma Gandhi, the great shaper of modern India. After a time, the conversation turned to spiritual matters. The theologian tactfully related to Gandhi his own personal experience of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Gandhi quietly thought for a moment and then lamented, **"My own throne is still vacant."**

That's a temptation of all of us -- to do our own will -- to go our self-centered way without respect to any ultimate demands that might be made on us. Most of us know that the throne of our life is not vacant. We sit there. We seek to be the master of our fate, the captain of our souls.

Charter Piggot has reminded us: **"If Christ is to have the throne of your being, He will get it only one way. He won't take it because you happen to leave it vacant. He won't take it by storm. He will get it because you give it to Him by deliberate, conscious, willing choice."**

We often hear it said that Jesus' teachings "turned the world upside down". Perhaps it would be more accurate to say Jesus showed us that we live in an upside down world. In Jericho, He turned His back on the leading citizens and stayed with the social outcast, a tax collector. He held as valued

by God those whom the world despised. He showed us, that along side the truth of God, the values of this world are inverted.

The commitment question is the one that Jesus would ask: "Will you make My will your will? Will you allow me to sit on the throne of your life?"

II. The second question is "Will you make My love your love?" This is not much different from the commitment question, but we ask it to underscore the very heart of commitment.

Dr. Babcock, many years ago at the Brick Church in New York City, said: **"If men cannot believe in Christians, whom they have seen, why should they believe in Christ, whom they have not seen?"**

There is a footnote in our old hymnal about the phrase which most Protestant churches removed from some of the early versions of the Apostles Creed: **"He descended into Hell."** One of the reasons we took it out was that there is scant Biblical evidence for it. There is a story of a chaplain in a mental hospital, working with patients to prepare a worship service. When they came to the Apostles' Creed, they discussed whether or not to leave that phrase in or take it out, and one of the patients said, **"It has to be there! I have to know that He has descended into hell with me!"**

He's been there with us and He knows what it means to be human. In the same fashion, we need to be there for some others in the hell of their lives, loving them for Christ. He continually asks the question: **"Will you love as I love?"**

III. The final query that will help us get to the ultimate commitment question of "will you lay down your life for me" is this - Will you make my power your power.

I heard a story recently that I believe speaks to us. A woman traveling out west got behind this slow moving delivery truck on a narrow winding road and because of the nature of the road, never had a chance to pass the truck.

To make matters worse, the truck would stop every few miles and the driver would get carrying a broom. He would then proceed to beat on the side panels of the truck. After a few moments of this,

he would return to the cab and drive on for a few more miles, very slowly, until he would stop and repeat the process with the broom again.

After thirty minutes of this, the woman finally got out of her car and went up to this man while he was hitting the sides of the truck with his broom. As calmly, as she could she asked him why he continued to do this every few miles. He replied, **"Lady, this is a one ton panel truck, and in the back here I've got two tons of canaries...If I can't keep half of them up in the air I can't move my truck"**.

Well, that makes the point doesn't it? It's a question of power. That is a part of the commitment question: Jesus asks us, **"Will you make my power your power?"**

Isn't it true that we constantly try to separate these questions in our lives from each other but we never can? We can't be strong in our serving without receiving strength that is beyond ourselves. We can't be out on the street forever giving away what we don't have.

An Anglican Bishop was asked to speak at a Christian Conference somewhere in England. For many weeks, he didn't respond to the written invitation. Finally the correspondence secretary for the Conference wrote the Bishop an insistent note, **"We must know,"** he said, **"if you're coming. We need to make our plans."**

The Bishop wrote back that he was waiting for the guidance of the Holy Spirit on the matter. He would let them know in about four weeks.

The exasperated secretary fired back this letter. **"Bishop, please don't bother. We withdraw the invitation. We're not interested in having anyone speak to our Conference who lives four weeks away from the Holy Spirit!"**

The surest way to find Christ is to turn our attention from our own concerns, even our own suffering, to the concerns and sufferings of others. Martin Luther used to say: **"Our neighbor is the next person we meet and for that person we are to BE Christ"**. That is what Jesus was trying to tell us in His words and to show us by His example. He modeled for us how we are to dedicate our

lives to serving God and others. The call of commitment is the call to set aside our personal agendas in favor of Christ's agenda.

Many years ago, Dr. James Dobson taught science and math in middle school. He set high standards for his students. As he writes, he ruled each classroom with "**kindness and firm discipline**". The students responded well, and he rarely had a discipline problem.

Years later, one of Dr. Dobson's former students contacted him. She wanted to attend church with him and his family. Over the next few months, this young woman became a regular attendee of Dobson's church. She became a Christian, and an active participant in the life of the church. One day, Dr. Dobson asked the young lady why she had contacted him after so many years. She replied, "**Because when I was a seventh-grade student in junior high school, you were the *only* person in my life who acted like you respected and believed in me . . . and I wanted to know your God**".

When people meet you, does your life create the desire for them to know YOUR God?