

"SWORD"
Matthew 26:51-54

February 13,2013

Ash Wednesday

This year, in our Wednesday Lent services, we want to focus our attention on various objects that are in the story about Jesus' suffering and death. We will focus on the object themselves and what they mean. These things can help us better understand the meaning of Jesus' death for our lives. Tonight, we want to consider the sword.

In our text for tonight, after Jesus and His disciples finished eating the Passover, they went to the Garden of Gethsemane. The time for Jesus to suffer and die for all people was near. Jesus had lived with His twelve apostles for three years. Jesus had led them, taught them, comforted them, and helped them. Now, it was time to leave. Jesus had predicted that and informed them that this would happen.

However, when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, the disciples were not ready. Peter, in a panic, decided to use his sword to protect Jesus. He hit a servant for the high priest and cut off his ear. Jesus said, "Enough! Don't use your sword." Then Jesus healed the servant.

That Peter was very proud and stubborn. Earlier, when Jesus predicted His suffering and death, Peter tried to stop Him. Peter said, "No way, Lord. That will not happen to You!" When Jesus ate His Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus washed their feet to teach them humility. But Peter said, "No way, Lord! You are not going to wash my feet." When Jesus told Peter, "Tonight, you will deny me three times," Peter said, "No way, Lord. I will rather die with You than deny You." So, when soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Peter was proud and stubborn and tried to use a sword to protect Jesus.

Why did Peter and the other disciples even have swords? Jesus had taught them to love one another, even to love their enemies. But the disciples had different ideas. The Jewish people were expecting a strong and mighty Savior. They were expecting a powerful King who would come, fight against the Roman armies, defeat them, and force them out of their country. The disciples

thought they would be soldiers in the Savior's army. So they needed swords. Peter used his sword to try and force Jesus' way.

Sometimes, His church tries to do the same: force people to go Jesus' way. Long ago, Christians tried to force Jews to believe in Jesus. The Jews had a choice: the church or the sword. They could become Christians or die. Today, we may act like that. We want people to believe in God, come to church and Bible class, and worship Jesus with us. Jesus wants that, too. We try to force people to do that. We don't use swords to force them, but we use pressure to make them feel guilty and ashamed if they don't come. Parents try to pressure children to come to church and Bible school. When people come to church, then we may begin to pressure them to become involved and do things to support the church. Even if we don't do that, some people may *feel* that we are doing that.

However, pressure is not Jesus' way. Jesus did not need the disciples to fight. Jesus has all the power in the world, but He did not force it. Peter forgot about that. Peter had seen that power. When Peter and the other disciples were in a boat and a strong storm came up, Jesus said, "Peace, be still," and the storm stopped, but now Peter forgot. Peter had seen Jesus walk on the water and Jesus allowed Peter to walk on the water, too, but now Peter forgot. Jesus even had the power to raise people from the dead, but Peter forgot.

However, Jesus had not forgotten. Jesus told Peter, "Put your sword back in its place. Every person who uses the sword will die with the sword. I can ask my Father in heaven and he will send more than 12,000 angels to help me." In other words, I have the power to protect myself. I have the power to save myself." Then, Jesus helped Peter remember His purpose. Jesus said, "I must experience suffering as my Father has planned." Jesus meant, "Now is the time for saving people. I have the power to defend myself, but I choose suffering."

Jesus doesn't want us to force people to love Him, force people to come to church, force children to come to Bible school. Jesus' way is (how?) love. Jesus did not come to be a mighty Warrior King to force people to obey Him. Jesus did not come to fight the Romans and kick them out of Israel. Jesus did not come to kill His enemies, but, instead, Jesus came to let His enemies kill Him.

Jesus came to earth because He loved His enemies -- us and all sinners. Jesus came here to voluntarily offer Himself in our place for our sins. Jesus is truly God and has all power, but Jesus came, gave up His power, and accepted the punishment for our sins -- death on the cross. He earned our forgiveness by obeying the Father and accepting that death on the cross. He freed us from desiring power and force. He freed us to become His children -- sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father.

Jesus death and resurrection has now changed us. We no longer have to use force and might in our lives. We can give up using power to force people to follow God. We are free to use love. How will we do that? We need a sword, but not this kind of sword -- a different sword: the Word of God. The Bible says that God's Word is like a sword -- powerful and sharp.. God's Word is called "the sword of the Holy Spirit."

This is how we can bring people to Jesus so they can know His love, have His forgiveness, and receive a new life. We don't use this sword (power). We use this "sword" (Bible). We don't force people. We share God's love. We don't speak words of threat. We use words from the Bible. We don't tell the story about ourselves and our church. We tell the story about Jesus who lived perfectly and gives us His holiness; who died on the cross and gives us full forgiveness; who rose again from death and gives us everlasting life. We show God's love, learning how to do that from the Bible. We act kindly and draw people to church so that they eagerly want to learn this message. That is Jesus' way and will work much better.

When you see this picture of a sword, you think of might and force. But this sword also helps us remember Jesus' love. Peter took this sword to help Jesus, protect Jesus, and save Jesus from the soldiers. In the same way, Jesus took the cross to help us, protect us, and save us from sin and the devil. Peter failed, but Jesus succeeded. We are free from sin. We are safe from the devil. Now we enjoy His love and forgiveness. We have the power to follow Him and joyfully obey Him. We have the desire to share this love, forgiveness, and new life with other people. So, each of you, take

up your sword -- the sword of the Spirit (Bible) -- and use it for the sake of Jesus and for the benefit of the people around you. May God help you to do that. Amen.