

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship [Lent V]
March 21, 2021
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We Make Our Own Frustration.
Matthew 26:14-16

(1)

Last Sunday, we focused on the character Kichijiro in the movie and Simon Peter in the Gospel of Luke with the key phrase “our weakness.” Even though both Kichijiro and Peter fell before the fear of death and denied Jesus Christ three times, they stood again, kept their faith, and dedicated their life to Christ. Today, we will focus on the character Father Ferreira in the movie and Judas Iscariot in the Gospel of Matthew with the key phrase “our frustration.”

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Shusaku Endo, the author of the book “Silence,” moved to Nagasaki and began to seek out the history of Christian persecution and martyrdom about 300 years ago in Japan. People tended to find faithful Christians who kept their faith even under threats of persecution and death, but Endo was attracted by people who lost their faith and apostatized in the same situation. In researching historical resources, Endo found a name, Father Cristovao Ferreira (1580-1650), who apostatized from Christianity.

Father Ferreira was born in Portugal in 1580. In 1600 when he turned 20 years old, he arrived at Macao of China in the hope of becoming a missionary. In Macao, he graduated from seminary and was ordained to the priesthood in 1608. And then, he crossed over the sea and arrived in Japan; he did his mission work in secret until 1633 under the severe persecution of the Tokugawa’s rule. During that time, there were about 300,000 Kakure Kirishitans (hidden Christians) in Japan. But in 1614, when the second decree of the deportation of all foreign missionaries was announced, all missionaries and those keeping their Christian faith had their lives at risk. In 1625 when Blessed Francisco Pacheco, who was the leader of all missionaries in Japan, was arrested and martyred, Father Ferreira became the leader of the missionaries. But in 1633, he was arrested, tortured by hanging him upside down for about five hours in a pit, and finally apostatized from Christianity. And then he became a so-called “fallen angel.”

In the beginning in Japan, of course, Father Ferreira was one of the most ardent missionaries. Laying down his life, he fulfilled his missionary work. When he and his co-missionaries were arrested and tortured, he endured all persecution. The fear of death was not an obstacle for him to do his job for Christ. (video) However, when he was hung upside down for about five hours, he finally decided to apostatize. (video) He prepared for death for the sake of Christ, but he suddenly overturned his determination. Why? For the sake of being released from his physical pain? For the sake of saving Japanese Kirishitans? Or others? (video) He might have apostatized because of liberation from his physical pain or because of saving Japanese Kirishitans. But I believe the major reason for his apostasy came from his frustration. He felt that all his work for 15 years in Japan at risk of his and other missionaries’ deaths went down the drain. The skepticism about Japanese Kirishitans made him give up. He agreed with the saying, “Mountains and rivers can be moved, but men’s nature cannot be moved.” After 15 years in Japan, he realized that Japan is a swamp; nothing grows here. He delivered them Jesus Christ as the Son of God, but they accepted Jesus Christ as the son of Dainichi, the great sun. He might have felt that all his work in Japan for Japanese Kirishitans engaged in a fruitless effort. For Father Ferreira, not fear of death but frustration was a risk factor to apostatize.

(3)

In today’s passage, Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus’s twelve disciples, appears. He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. The thirty pieces of silver was the amount of money to bring one servant to a house. For Judas, Jesus seemed to be worth a house servant.

Judas was a suspicious man in the Gospels. The authors of the Gospels described how Peter, Andrew, John, James, Matthew, and others became Jesus’s disciples. But they did not describe how Judas became His disciple. We call

him Judas Iscariot. There are some assertions that Iscariot referred to people of Kerieth, a town in southern Israel, or the Issacharite, one of Jacob's twelve sons and of the twelve Jewish tribes; so, some assume that Judas came from Kerieth or was from the tribe of Issachar. But there is a more agreeable assertion that Iscariot is a corruption of the Latin word "Sicarius" (meaning murderer or assassin). In Jesus's time, there were many radical Jewish groups that tried to liberate their nation from the Roman Empire, and one of them was "the Sicarii," the most radical and nationalist group, some of whom were terrorists assassinated people who were favorable of the dominant country and authorities. Thus, others assume that Judas Iscariot was a member of the Sicarii, a radical and nationalist man who wished for liberation from the Roman Empire through Jesus Christ.

Judas must have followed Jesus because he believed that Jesus is the Messiah who could save the people of Israel from the oppression of the Roman Empire. He thought it would be possible for Jesus because he already showed great power and authority as the Messiah. What is more, Jesus taught the kingdom of heaven. Judas believed that the kingdom of heaven would be the new nation of Israel being free from the Roman Empire.

However, as time went by with Jesus, Judas came to conceive that Jesus was not the person whom he expected. Jesus was not interested in defeating Roman forces, bringing freedom to the nation, and establishing a new nation. Instead, He focused on the least of the people. He healed the sick and drove out evil spirits. And He taught that the kingdom of heaven is for the poor. Those were not what he wanted or what he expected from Him. As time went on, Judas came to have doubts about Jesus; the doubts turned into complaints; the complaints turned into anger; and the anger turned into frustration. He might have felt that the three years with Jesus went down the drain and were waste of his time. He eventually decided to betray Jesus. For Judas, frustration was a risk factor to betray Jesus.

(4)

If so, what is the risk factor for us to lose our faith? Financial difficulties and hardship in life? A sudden accident or deterioration of health? Or a prosperous life? Father Ferreira fortified his faith when he was persecuted. He was even willing to die for the sake of Christ Jesus in a desperate situation. How about Judas? He might have been a member of the Sicarii. So, I believe even though there is no explanation in the Gospels, he must have been one of the most furious disciples when Jesus was excluded by the people, and he did his best to defend Jesus Christ from physical threats. When unexpected situations come to us, they make us fortify and deepen our faith...if we are in Christ Jesus. Even though we are in pain and suffering, we will expect how God works in the midst of our pain and suffering...if we are in Christ Jesus.

However, what if we become frustrated in Christ Jesus? Just like Father Ferreira and Judas Iscariot, we do our best for the sake of Christ, but what if the result coming out from our efforts is not what we expect? We pray fervently to God for healing of our or our loved ones' sickness, or pray to God to save us from our pain and suffering. But what if the result of our sincere prayers is not what we expect? Can you not be frustrated in Christ? What if our frustrations are repeated?

We should remember two things: one is that all our efforts for the sake of Christ never go down the drain because they are done by the Holy Spirit, not by our own efforts. God is always good and always perfect. Father Ferreira misunderstood that he did the mission work by himself. He was wrong. God did it through him. Even though the result coming out from his mission work for 15 years in Japan was not what he expected, Father Ferreira did his best at risk of death, so he should have trusted God and left the results to God. Please let the Holy Spirit lead you in your life, and the Spirit will lead you to the good way. The other thing we should remember is that we should not expect what Jesus Christ cannot give us. He is not a vending machine of our prayer requests. He is our Savior and our Lord. His existence itself is worthy enough to be praised. Judas misunderstood Jesus Christ. He was the Messiah who saves people from their sin, not from their oppression. He considered Jesus in his own way; he expected Jesus in his own way; he became disappointed with Jesus in his own way; and he betrayed Jesus in his own way. Don't make Jesus Christ in your own way. Just accept Him as He is. After all, we make our own frustration and come to leave our Lord Jesus Christ by the frustration that we make.