

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship [Lent IV]
March 14, 2021
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We are too weak before evil.
Luke 22:54-62

(1)

Last Sunday, we resumed our sermon series with the movie "Silence." With the key word "evil," we focused on the character Inoue in the movie, who is the governor and inquisitor persecuting the missionaries and Japanese Kirishitans, and the serpent in the book of Genesis who tempted the first woman to have the forbidden fruit. Through them, we were reminded that evil manifests himself to us and around us in various forms of banality in our lives. In the fourth session, today, we will focus on the character Kichijiro in the movie and Simon Peter in the Gospel of Luke with the key phrase "our weakness."

(2)

The two padres—Rodrigues and Garupe—wanted to go to Japan for two reasons. One is that they heard a rumor about their mentor Padre Ferreira who went to Japan as a missionary. The rumor was that he eventually apostatized to avoid being tortured and now lives in Japan with a Japanese name in an arranged marriage. They wanted to verify whether the rumor is true or not. The other is that they—as Catholic priests and missionaries—wanted to take care of Japanese Christians, to fortify their faith, and to evangelize the land of Japan with the good news of Jesus Christ. Padre Rodrigues and Garupe first met Kichijiro in Macao, China; he was a fisherman in his hometown and now could bring them to Japan. (video)

With his help, Padre Rodrigues and Garupe finally arrived at Japan. There, Rodrigues came to know about Kichijiro's wound in his heart. (video) Facing life or death, Kichijiro was overwhelmed by fear of death and he finally stepped on the Fumie, the copperplate of Jesus, to demonstrate that they are not Kirishitans or that they apostatize from Christianity, while his family members were killed for preserving their faith. He had been tormented by his denial and his family members' death. But by confessing his sin and weakness, he seemed to restore his faith and to become free from the torment.

However, the peaceful time in the village did not last long. Japanese guards captured some suspected Kirishitans in the village, and they forced them to verify themselves by stepping on the Fumie. Kichijiro was one of them, and he once again faced a matter of life or death. (video) I believe he became tormented again by his first denial and the memory of his family's death. After all, he denied his faith again for his life by stepping on the Fumie and spitting on the wooden cross. This was his second denial.

Now, Padre Rodrigues, Japanese Kirishitans in the village, and Kichijiro were captured. In the prison, they were constantly forced to apostatize from Christianity, and some of them were already killed by refusing it. Now, Kichijiro's turn came. Please focus on his glance in the video clip. (video) The camera in the prison stared at Kichijiro, and Kichijiro kept glancing at the camera. Here, the camera played a role of the eyes of Padre Rodrigues. When Kichijiro denied his faith the third time, he made eye contact with Padre Rodrigues.

Kichijiro was a fisherman in his hometown. I believe he was a good and honest man. One day, a foreign man who looked completely different came to his village and taught about something that he never heard of it. Kichijiro was fascinated by his messages and teachings about God's love for him—a person who was neglected and marginalized in his society. So, he decided to follow and become a Kirishitan. But he never knew that impending tragedy would come. He witnessed all his family members' death. He escaped and almost died in the sea. After many twists and turns, he returned to his hometown with foreign padres. He confessed his sin, restored his faith, found peace, helped his neighbors, and assisted the padres with food and guidance. But when he faced death

threats, he became weak and denied his faith. He confessed his sin again, but he denied again in the same situation. He did this three times.

(3)

In today's passage, Simon Peter appears. He was once a fisherman in his hometown of Bethsaida in Galilee. He was a good, honest, and faithful man. One day, a man from Nazareth came to him and showed his power and authority as the Messiah. Peter immediately came to know who he was, fell at his knees, and confessed, saying, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8). Jesus called Peter as His first disciple, and he became Jesus's most beloved one. He was with Jesus no matter where He visited. He stayed next to Jesus and was a witness of his Master's power and authority as the Son of God. And he was the one who professed, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16) and who received a compliment for his faith by his Master.

However, when his Master was arrested and brought to the house of the high priest, Peter did not dare to say something before people or to defend his Master to the guards. He just followed them in secret. When a servant girl recognized Peter, he denied and said, "Woman, I don't know him" (Luke 22:57). A little later, someone saw Peter and recognized him. Peter denied and said, "Man, I am not!" (v. 58). About an hour later, another man recognized Peter again, and he denied and said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" (v. 59). At that moment, Peter knew that his Master turned and looked at Peter. Peter made eye contact with Him. Before possible physical and death threats, Peter was overwhelmed by fear, hid himself behind people, and denied his Master three times.

(4)

Kichijiro and Peter! Who can dare to blame them for their lack of faith? Their reactions could be ours in the same situation. Evil comes to us in the form of violence, so we come to fall before fear. Evil comes to us in the form of temptation, so we come to fall before desire and satisfaction. Evil comes to us in the form of tiresomeness, so we come to fall before lethargy. Evil comes to us in the form of prosperity, so we come to fall before money. Evil comes to us in the form of indifference, so we come to fall before selfishness. Evil comes to us in a variety of forms to which we are vulnerable, so we come to fall again and again. We are too weak to resist evil.

Here, we need to admit that we are weak before evil. Every Christian cannot be Stephen the Martyr who was stoned to death for the sake of Jesus Christ. Every Christian cannot be faithful ones who keep their unwavering faith in any circumstance. We cannot be super Christians.

Rather than the frequent denials of Kichijiro, we should focus on his reaction after the denials. He agonized over his fall, but he came to Padre Rodrigues and confessed his sin. After his second denial, he agonized but he came to the padre again and confessed his sin; and the third time, too. In two weeks, you will see the ending of his life. For Kichijiro, his frequent denials were not his habitual wrongdoings, and his confessions were not habitual repentance. He struggled and agonized plenty before and after he fell before evil. Even though he fell, he stood again and sought forgiveness.

How about Peter? After he denied Jesus three times, he went outside and cried, cried, and cried. Peter might have agonized over and been tormented by his denials, and Jesus's eyes looking at him might have hovered around in Peter's head. However, he never collapsed. When he heard of the news of Jesus's resurrection from the women, Peter was the first disciple among eleven to run to the tomb. And after he met with the resurrected Jesus, he dedicated the rest of his life to spreading the gospel, to founding the churches, and to nurturing Christ believers.

Jesus Christ our Lord would be pleased with ones who never fall before evil. But our Lord is also the One who would be more pleased when the lost sheep is found and when the lost son comes back to Him. Jesus is seeking us who could fall before evil but could stand up again and come to Him. Amen.