

Easter 4 4/22/18
Psalm 23 B

HE RESTORES MY SOUL

When the time came to find out what went on behind closed doors, there was no mystery, no gossip, no innuendo; there was just simply the fact. And the fact was she had been caught in the act of adultery. So, it wasn't like she could make up an excuse; it wasn't like she could come up with some kind of extenuating circumstances. She had been caught in the very act of adultery. The only thing she could do was face the consequences; and they were coming fast and furious. The Pharisees and Scribes set her before Jesus and leveled the charge against her, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" (Jn 8:4-5).

She doesn't have to imagine what Jesus would say. Her soul is so confused by the trouble that she's in that she has a very good idea what Jesus is going to say. In her mind, she has to be thinking, "I got caught in the very act. I can't give an excuse. I'm going to die. The stones are going to fly and hit me. And it's going to hurt. How long will it take me to die? I am going to die – in my sin, in my shame, in my guilt. And then I am going to hell because of my sin. That is what is going to happen to me." You know her heart is racing, her stomach is in knots, and her soul is troubled.

On Maundy Thursday, the rooster crowed twice. And when it did, Peter remembered Jesus' words, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times" (Mk 14:30). And, Peter broke down and he wept, bitterly. He wept because his soul was troubled. He knew the promises he had made, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death" (Lk 22:33). "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away ... Even if I must die with, I will not deny you" (Mt 26:33, 35)! He has to be thinking, "I didn't do any of that. No, I denied Him because I was scared – scared of a little girl, scared of the crowd; scared to be associated with Jesus. But, it happened. I denied Him. And I heard Him say, 'Whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father who is in heaven' (Mt 10:33)." You know Peter's heart was racing and his stomach was in knots. His soul was troubled, because that is what happens when you are confronted with the shame and the guilt of your sin. That is what happens when you are confronted

with the truth of God's Law and you see your sin and you know, that because of your sin, you deserve God's eternal wrath and punishment.

The heart races, the stomach is in knots, and your soul is troubled. You know all about that. Sure you do. It happens when you realize you have not feared, loved, and trusted in God above all things as you are supposed to. Your heart races, as you click on that website in your darkened home, filled with embarrassment at the very thought anyone would ever find out. Your stomach is in knots as you hit "send" on that text to that special someone who makes you feel so good about yourself, that you pray your spouse and children know nothing about. Your soul is troubled as you drive in the driveway, walk to the door, and know you will have to look your spouse in the face, that spouse you had that row with that morning and left with a slam of the door. Your heart races and your stomach is in knots as you look at all those bills that have come due but you can't even begin to pay, because you coveted and bought stuff with money you don't have. Your soul is troubled because you have spoken ill of others. You knew it was not true, but you said it anyway.

Your heart is racing, your stomach in knots, your soul is troubled because your sin is ever before you. You – you – deserve only God's temporal and eternal punishment. Your soul is troubled, just as troubled as that woman caught in adultery or as troubled as Peter as he weeps bitter tears.

And then Jesus speaks. Here is this woman caught in adultery, waiting for the stones to come flying at her and kill her. And, Jesus speaks these words, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn 8:7). And one by one, they drop their stones and they went away, until there was no one but Jesus and the woman. "Jesus...said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more'" (Jn 8:10-11). And with that word of forgiveness, Jesus calmed her heart and unknotted her stomach. He restored her soul.

There is Peter, with the disciples, on Easter evening, behind locked doors in fear, and "Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'" (Jn 20:19). And, then He showed them His hands and His side. With words of sweet absolution, He forgives and Peter's troubled soul is restored.

That's what Jesus does. Do you know why He does it? Because He is the Good Shepherd. He restores your soul. He did it for the woman, He did it for Peter and He does it for you. In fact, He's doing it this very morning.

You come here, your heart is racing, your stomach is in knots, your soul is troubled. You know your sin and what you have done. You're hurting. You're embarrassed. You're ashamed. You're scared. So, Jesus speaks, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." "Take, eat, this is My body. Take, drink, this is My Blood, given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus calms your heart, stills your stomach, and restores your soul. Through baptism, Absolution, and Holy Communion, Jesus gives you the forgiveness, life, and salvation He won for you when He, as the Good Shepherd, laid down His life for you on Calvary's cross. There, upon that cross, He gave His life for you, as payment for all your sins. There, upon that cross, He suffered the wrath, and anger, and punishment of God for you, in your place, so you will never have to face them. There, upon that cross, He took away your sin, your shame, your guilt. And, three days later, Christ rose to life again, bringing life and immortality to light.

Now, He lives to wash you clean of all your sin and all its death and damnation in the water and Word of Holy Baptism. He speaks words of forgiveness into your ear by means of Holy Absolution. He feeds you with the very body and blood He gave into death for you, to forgive you all your sins and give you strength to live a holy life. Look what happens: your heart is calm, your stomach is still, and your soul is restored. All this is yours because the Lord is your Good Shepherd.