

## *No Greater Love † In Power*<sup>2</sup>

- † Over physical forces (vv.1-14)
- † Over spiritual darkness (vv.15-27)

In the Name of Jesus, whose Gospel powers our salvation, dearly redeemed disciples of our Lord:

How often does the Holy Spirit repeat the warning in God's Good Book? The Old Testament Proverb says, "*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*" (Proverbs 16:18 NIV84) Sometimes it's shortened to, "*Pride goeth before the fall.*" A man with his own fall was Paul inspired by God to write: "*So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*" (1 Corinthians 10:12 NIV84) Sometimes it's a harmless mess, as when an older brother was teaching younger siblings how to eat a banana split in Mom's car – neatly. Respectfully a younger sister interrupted, "You're spilling your ice cream on your lap." Or you might attempt to silence your distracting GPS, but not notice the car stopped in front of you. Insurance can't cover repair hassles. For our bodies and souls the only real insurance is God's Word to humble and heal us. As we see our Savior arrested and arraigned tonight, we revel once more in His unsurpassed love. There is **No Greater Love † In Power** – first....

### † Over physical forces (vv.1-14)

Jesus our High Priest just finished His Sacerdotal Prayer (John 17). He prayed to His heavenly Father for Himself, His Apostles and us with all believers who belong by faith to His hidden Church of all time. Across the Kidron Valley within sight of the Temple is the Garden of Gethsemane. In the privacy of its olive grove Jesus had often gathered His disciples. Already He had sweat great drops of blood pleading for some other way to save us from our sins. The Father's silence said it clearly: The suffering and death of His only begotten Son was the only ransom for our guilt and that of the world. It had to be.

Judas the traitor knew the place would serve for arresting Jesus away from the crowds. So he led **physical forces** there from the Jewish religious leaders. He must have felt fairly invincible moving quickly through the night with rattling spears and swords, torches and lanterns blazing. Selling Jesus for thirty pieces of silver would end his access to the disciples' treasury. Judas just wanted Jesus gone.

How frustrating it must have been for Judas to watch Jesus for three years using His power to heal the sick and raise the dead, but do nothing to capitalize their profits or drive the foreign Roman invaders from Israel. How could Judas have imagined a more disappointing Messiah? Such a rabbi was not fit for teaching as far as Judas was concerned. Why not get some personal profit ushering Him out?

Was Judas convinced he himself was the best a man could be? He missed the almighty power of the great "**I AM.**" We need to recall how Jesus went out to Judas and his **physical forces**. Sometimes treatments fail our bodies. Friends and colleagues fail to take our advice. Home and country may seem headed in the wrong direction. Jesus was not the victim then or now – not by the power of **physical forces** at all. Aren't you amazed how He went out to meet the mob? He asked twice, "*Who is it you're looking for?*" As the eternal God, the great **I AM**, it took only Jesus' Word to drive the soldiers back into the dark underbrush and down to the ground. They could not take Him at will. Their force was useless.

Yet Jesus would willingly give Himself up to His heavenly Father's will. He volunteered to save us from our sins. But once again Jesus' lead disciple was getting in the way. Peter determined to defend

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotes are from a draft translation by the undersigned for the Wartburg Project – John.

<sup>2</sup> From Lenten series: *No Greater Love – Our Savior's Passion Sermons*. March-April, 2014 – New Life, Shoreview, MN

Jesus at all costs. Have you ever wondered why Peter was not killed? Surrounded by armed men, a lone fisherman with a wild sword normally would not last a minute. But there was nothing normal about Jesus' arrest. It was illegal, unfair, and fully gracious on God's part. He was determined to save us in spite of Peter. **"Put your sword into its sheath,"** Jesus told him. **"The cup my Father gave me – should I not drink it?"** Dr. Luke records how Jesus **"touched the man's ear and healed him."** (Luke 22:51)

Jesus had power to heal and His holy Word to prevail. But He could also summon myriads of angels. Instead, He used His almighty Word to save His frightened followers: **"If you are looking for me, let these men go,"** He told the mob. Jesus had prayed to His heavenly Father, **"I lost none of those you gave me."** He gave Himself up: **"This is your hour – when darkness reigns."** (Luke 22:53)

### ✠ Over spiritual darkness (vv.15-27)

**Darkness** is the great enemy of our souls, isn't it? We may be on fire for the Lord for a time with family, friends and church members looking up to us in respect and admiration. But just when we think we are standing firm, we can fall most miserably – like David with Bathsheba, or Solomon in his wealth and wives, or Paul in his religious zeal as a Pharisee, or Peter in the courtyard of the high priest.

So cold and dark it was outside, but darker still inside Peter's soul. Jesus' warnings were muffled under Peter's proud confidence that he could go into the heart of the beast for his Lord and come out unscathed. How crafty the prince of darkness proved to be when the most dangerous individual amid all those soldiers and officials was the servant girl at the door. Like the glowing embers of their charcoal fire, Peter's faith could easily flicker and die as he denied even knowing Jesus as a disciple.

But Peter was not the only one whose soul was suffering from **spiritual darkness**. The high priest and officials had heard much of Jesus' Word. Yet they rejected it. One of them hit Jesus in the face. **"Is that how you answer the high priest?" he demanded.** Stubborn ignorance stuck in **spiritual darkness**. Human logic and brotherly love could not break through. **No Greater Love ✠ In Power** was needed to light the way. **"If I said something wrong," Jesus answered, "testify about the wrong. But if rightly, why do you hit me?"** A few months later the Holy Spirit reports through Luke in Acts: **"So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."** (Acts 6:7 NIV84) Only God's Word can enlighten sinful hearts.

Sadly, Peter's denial was not over. For the moment it seems he did not remember Jesus' warnings at all. How easily we forget what our parents and pastors have tried to teach us in the Name of the Lord! Bible passages that we so carefully memorized in Catechism can slip away like a sinking ship in murky waters if we fail to watch a pray. Bystanders warming themselves asked Peter again, **"You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?" "I am not!"** – denial number two for **"that man."** A more credible witness who could find than **"a relative of the man whose ear Peter cut off?" "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?"** Denial three and the rooster crow – it all happened as our loving Lord predicted.

One great danger is relying on ourselves by thinking, "I am determined not to do what Peter did!" Lent is prime time to examine our hearts. See what our sinful pride finally cost Jesus. We survey His wondrous cross in favorite Lenten hymns. How earnestly we sing in one final stanza: *Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.* (CW 125:4) Are we so sure of our dedication? The pastor of a church in London blurted to his congregation: "I'm surprised to hear you sing that. Do you know that altogether you put only 15 shillings in the collection bag this morning?"<sup>3</sup> Even in generous congregations where God's people give in cheerful faith, we need **No Greater Love ✠ In Power**. Our Lord Jesus forgives us with Peter. Christ guards us from temptations regarding our time, talent and treasure. Add to your faith with His Word. (Cf. 2 Peter 1:5-8) Keep on surveying the wondrous cross. And may God's glorious grace light up our hearts and lives with sincere praise by word and deed. In Christ alone! Amen.

<sup>3</sup> Father Ignatius at St. Edmund's Church. Quoted in *Christian Worship Handbook*. (NPH: Milwaukee, WI, 1997), p.152.

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