



John 18:15-27  
So That You May Believe: John  
“Weather-vane Faith”

Rev. Brian North  
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Have you ever made a declaration about something – your love for someone or something, or maybe the opposite, that you dislike or despise something (onions, anyone?) – only to end up making a complete change, or denial of what you said, sometime later? Let me share one from my life that some of you have heard me share before but will be new to many of you. By late August or early September of 1996, I had become pretty good friends with this gal named Gwen. I was a ski bum with a college degree, and she had a real job as a children’s ministry director at the Presbyterian church in town. We had met through a mutual friend a little less than a year before. And after those months of hanging out together, skiing, hiking, being involved in church together, and so forth, we’d become good friends. And after about 10 months of friendship, Gwen felt we needed to sit down and have a talk about our relationship; and she informed me that she would never date me. I needed to be “ok” with that, or we needed not to hang out together anymore.

I was kind of shy and not real great at making friends “out of the blue” so I decided I’d rather have her as my one friend in town and opted for that choice. About 7 or 8 weeks later, when I came back into town after taking a week-long vacation, Gwen shared with me that her feelings had changed and she was open to dating. I said to her, “Well, that’s not what you said a few weeks ago, so I’m sorry, you’re too late.” 😊 Just kidding. Funny thing was, during that 7- or 8-week period after she said she’d never date me, I would concoct in my mind reasons why I didn’t want to date Gwen anyway, even though I really would have liked to. Even if I could remember what those things were, I wouldn’t share them with you because Gwen will hear this and I don’t want her to change again. 😊

The point is: we all have done this in different aspects of our lives, where we flip-flop and change positions on something, or in a moment of weakness don’t live in a way that’s authentic to our beliefs or values. **Unfortunately, we Christians do this in our spiritual journey at times, as well.** It may not always be so blatant as a complete 180 degree turn, and turning our back on Jesus in an “active” sort of way; but “passively” we probably frequently miss

opportunities to give Jesus credit or stand up for him. Of course, for many of us, we have done a 180 with Jesus the other direction: We used to think Jesus and the Christian faith was a bunch of hooey, and now we find ourselves professing Jesus as Lord and Savior, or at least exploring his claims and who he is. Regardless of the big picture spiritual journey each of us has been on, we Christians have undoubtedly at times not represented Jesus well, even living or speaking in ways that completely denied being in relationship with him.

So, what do we do about this? How can we consistently be Jesus' disciples all the time, wherever we are, and in whatever we're doing? It's a huge question, and we're going to answer it in the next 15 minutes or so. So, buckle up and hold onto your hats as we turn to **John 18:15-27** and then dive into the rest of this message...

So, in this portion of the events there are two things happening simultaneously. First, you have Peter who three times denies knowing Jesus. Second, you have Jesus, being questioned about his teaching and his followers. Let's look at Peter first. After Jesus is arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, as we looked at last week, Peter and another disciple follow along. Perhaps others of them did as well, but these two are noted in particular. **The unnamed disciple traditionally has been believed to be John, the writer of the gospel.** There are several instances in this Gospel where an unnamed disciple – and this disciple is one of the twelve, not someone in addition to the twelve – there are several instances in the Gospel According to John where he identifies a specific disciple, but doesn't give his name. For instance, it happens at the Last Supper, the crucifixion, the empty tomb, and after his resurrection, as well as others.

And so here, we see something similar once again. Some scholars believe that each time it is John, son of Zebedee, one of Jesus' disciples, and the brother of James who was also one of the disciples. Along with this is usually the belief that this same John is the one who wrote the Gospel according to John. So: **If those two things are right, then it's John's way of identifying himself in the events recorded, without actually using his name.**

This unnamed disciple first goes in with Jesus to where he is questioned. He has some sort of connection with Annas, whom John calls “the high priest” though in last week’s passage we see he no longer formally carries that title after having done so for 9-10 years, and is the father-in-law of the current high priest. But Annas is still well-respected in the Jewish community, and in some ways is like the “priest to the priests” because of his stature in the community. So, there’s probably a family connection between Annas and this unnamed disciple, presumably John, and so he goes in to the courtyard, or wherever exactly the questioning takes place. He’s got the credentials to get in further than others. Then he comes out to get Peter, who had to wait because he didn’t have that same connection.

And John uses his family connections to get Peter in to the party, so to speak. Sometimes, it’s nice to know people who know people, right? And that’s what happens here. So, in goes Peter. **And on his way toward Jesus, Peter has the opportunity to affirm his discipleship to Jesus, but instead, denies knowing him.** And then he denies knowing him a second and third time, with the last denial to someone who was pretty sure he recognized Peter from the garden of Gethsemane earlier that night.

At that point the rooster crows. It seems like a funny detail for John to note, except that it was Jesus himself who told Peter in John 13 that he would deny knowing Jesus before the rooster crowed. Now, the rooster crowing doesn’t necessarily mean this has been an all-night affair and it’s just before sunrise. We think of roosters crowing as the dawn begins to show, a bit before the sun rises. But the fact is, roosters crow for a variety of reasons, and can crow at any time of the day or night.

An interesting side note that comes out of this passage is why weathervanes are traditionally made to look like a rooster. Here’s what I read this week on this, “The first known weather vane sat on top of the Tower of the Winds in Athens during the first century BC. **“The rooster weather vane...appeared a thousand years later when an edict from the pope announced that every church must carry the symbol of a rooster. This was to remind the faithful of Peter’s betrayal of Jesus, who said that the rooster would not crow until Peter had denied him three times”** (Charles Klamkin,

**Weather Vanes, 1973).**<sup>1</sup> In other words, the rooster on a weathervane is there to remind us: “don’t be like Peter denying Jesus.” So, whenever you see a weathervane with a rooster incorporated into it, this passage is why.

Now, in between his denials Jesus is being interrogated. And the irony between what he says and what Peter says is thick. In response to the questioning, Jesus says: “I have spoken openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said” (John 18:20-21). Two things about this.

**First, Jesus is reminding them about the openness and transparency of his ministry and teaching.** He hasn’t done anything in secret. There’s no ulterior motive, no agenda against the Roman government, or against the Jewish faith. He doesn’t quote himself here, but you may recall one effort to trap him in regards to paying taxes to this Roman foreign occupying government. Jesus says, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Mark 12:17). It’s a statement of respect toward a foreign government that’s overthrown their own. So, he’s not trying to overthrow the Romans, and he’s also not trying to undermine the Jewish faith, either. And that’s essentially what Jesus says here in this so-called trial. Everything has been out in the open. There’s no ulterior motive.

**Secondly, he encourages his inquisitors to ask his disciples about what he taught. “Surely they know what I said” he says at the end of verse 21.**

We see here that Jesus is trusting his disciples to stand for truth and stand up for his ministry and ultimately: to stand up for him. And at that very moment, Peter is in the middle of his three denials of even *knowing* Jesus. And yet, it wasn’t that long ago that Peter declared that Jesus was the Messiah. So, he’s gone from this place of believing in Jesus and trusting him to denying him. It’s like Gwen telling me she’d never date me, then changing her mind a few weeks later. Now, for sure, Peter didn’t fully understand what it meant that Jesus was the Messiah, just like Gwen had no idea that telling me her feelings had changed would lead to a marriage of 25 years and counting (I hope!). Peter had his ideas that most likely were largely bound up in expectations within the Jewish community about what the Messiah would be and do –

overthrow the Romans. But still, to go from *that* proclamation to *complete denial of knowing Jesus*, is a total turnaround. Why did this happen?

Well, the fact is: **Sometimes we Jesus followers fear the consequences of being affiliated with Jesus.** We fear alienation, being left off the invitation list by our non-Christian friends, being on the outside of certain social circles, or that there might be professional consequences, or something else. Yesterday morning I stumbled across an article online written by a college student titled, “How are Christians received at a California Public University?” The author had been accepted to Cal Poly, in San Luis Obispo, and she was concerned about how she would be received as an evangelical-leaning Christian when she started this past fall. She cited a study that was done collaboratively by a few universities (Ohio State and a couple others) not long ago that noted, “evangelical Christian college students ... feel a need to conceal their identity and perspectives on college campuses.” Sounds like Peter, 2,000 years later.

Her conclusion, based on her experience of a few months at college and also talking with other Christians on campus is this: “My experience at Cal Poly so far is that I’ve never sensed much judgment, and I have never once felt any alienation for being Christian. None of my fellow students or anyone else on campus has laughed at me or made rude remarks towards me or my faith.” And then she concludes with an observation from the study that she cited earlier: **“Results from this study provide compelling evidence that appreciation of evangelical Christianity can and does occur over four years of college through a mosaic of experiences.”**<sup>2</sup>

In other words, when Christians spend time with non-Christians, the level of respect and appreciation for Jesus followers tends to go up over the course of four years of college. I think this is good news for us in our relationships with non-Christians, and ought to encourage us *not* to deny our connection to Jesus as Peter does here. To whatever degree we *have* been like Peter is here, we should take heart that once he’s filled with the Holy Spirit and follows the leading of the Spirit boldly, Peter becomes one of the most outspoken and courageous leaders in the early church. In fact, all the disciples go from hiding out in the upper room after Jesus’ death, to living boldly for him

because of his resurrection and the movement of the Spirit. The point is: God's not done with us just because we haven't been as open and transparent about our connection to Jesus as we could have been. God can still work through us in powerful ways. In fact, he *wants* to work through people like you and me. That's the purpose he has for you in life.

So, much like a weathervane in the blowing of the wind, let's go with the blowing of the Spirit, who will point us in the right direction, living lives that overflow with the Good News of the Gospel: **Jesus is counting on us to do it. As he says, in verse 21, "Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said" (John 18:21).** He's spoken to us through Scripture, and he's drawn us into relationship with him. Jesus is counting on you and me to stand up for our faith; to stand up for Jesus, to stay consistent for him with the Spirit leading us. So, let us live in step with the Spirit, glorifying God and sharing how Jesus has touched and transformed us, so that without shame or fear we'd lead people toward Jesus wherever we are. And maybe one day, there will be another edict from the pope: that weathervanes no longer need a rooster as a reminder for us Christians to live transparently for Jesus each and every day. Let's pray...Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Found at this website: <https://www.almanac.com/why-do-roosters-crow-10-riveting-facts-about-roosters>

<sup>2</sup> This quote came from the article I mentioned, though it is her quoting the study itself. Here is a link to the study: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2021.775303/full>