



*Dan Nolta*

By the time you read this I will have turned 70. I now deem myself a certifiable “old man.” Am I self-conscious or sensitive about my age? Not at all. I am enjoying this part of my life immensely and think being 70 is lots of fun.

For the last 40 years my wife Judi and I have lived in the same Tacoma home. It has been remodeled again and again as kids came and now grandkids come. I love life and enjoy my home while still traveling internationally to promote police chaplaincy and train their chaplains.

I have aged from being one of the young kid pastors to middle-aged chaplain and finally retired Chaplain Emeritus. I have found myself going back to the basics and not caring too much about such things as postmodernism and the like.

As always I am intrigued by and savor the gospel of John for its combination of story and magnificent truths as spoken directly by the Master. Some of these truths, both question and command, especially captivated me in my recent reading, and I share them with you day by day.

In the photo I’m with a very young police officer/chaplain from the Kenya Administration Police.

*BIBLE READING: John 8:1-11*

“...caught in adultery.” Which of us has not gotten caught? Caught—our hands in the “cookie jar” or some really, honest-to-goodness, downright, anybody would think it was, kind of sin. Caught, with no doubt about our guilt and our faces burning with shame and our hearts hurting and our head saying, “I wish I hadn’t.” But it is too late.

We find ourselves surrounded by our accusers—parents, teachers, or our boss—and our head hangs waiting for the punishment. Will it be timeout, a spanking (for my generation), a trip to the principal’s office, or firing on the spot? “Clean out your desk! You are done!”

The woman waits, crumpled on the ground beside Jesus as the crowd jeers and hefts the stones in their own sin-stained hands. Her punishment will hurt a lot before it ends in death. This is not a “cookie jar” kind of sin. This is the worst and she knows it. She knows her sin and she knows its punishment. She cowers in expectation.

The Master challenges her accusers and then speaks to her. His words are soft but commanding: “Go now, and leave your life of sin.” It is not jeering, mocking, stone throwing punishment, but a loving command filled with a life-changing challenge.

Leave it. Stop. Don’t do it anymore. You will be changed. The void in our heart and mind—once filled with sin—is now filled with gratitude, joy, and expectancy for what lies ahead.

*SONG: The Cleansing Wave*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father today I leave all my sins behind. They are forgiven. They are gone. I have new life in you. Thank you.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: John 8:31-41*

If you decide you need to lie to someone, please be smart and don't let that someone be a police officer. Police officers undergo special training in how to ask questions and discern if a person is lying. They then make a decision about the kind of character with which they are dealing. If a person lies, he or she *is* a liar. If he or she tells the truth, he or she *is* truthful.

It is interesting that our reading for today is centered in a chapter that is all about who Jesus is. Who is this character? He says, "I tell you the truth." And in the same passage: [I am] "a man who has told you the truth."

In a defining moment of his life and ministry Jesus says: "I am the way, the *truth* and the life" (emphasis mine). By those words Jesus defines his character.

Considering and accepting his nature and his person we "know the Truth." We know Jesus. It is in knowing him, this Truth, this God, that we are freed. For all sin is deceit, a lie, and contrary to the truth. Accepting Jesus leaves no space for deceit and untruths.

The woman caught in adultery, met by the Truth, takes on the virtue of truth, leaving behind her life of deceit. She is set free. We are set free!

*SONG: Open My Eyes That I May See*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Father, you are Truth.*

*I know you. I know the Truth. I am free by your truth.*

*I am free in you. Thank you for setting me free from every lie, from every sin. Help me to go out today and be the light of truth to my world.*

—Dan Nolta

Tuesday  
January 19

Will You Really Lay  
Down Your Life for Me?

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*BIBLE READING: John 13:33-38*

In October of 1995 I buried John. John was my friend, my sometimes Friday night ride-a-long host. He was a deputy sheriff. When he was killed he was a part of our drug unit serving a warrant on a drug house. In the early morning hours he laid down his life, killed by a drug dealer who is now serving out a 45-year sentence for John's murder.

Several years before that fateful October morning, John took his oath of office as a deputy sheriff. On the day of his commissioning John laid down his life, if necessary, to die protecting and serving. At 8 a.m. on October 16 John's commitment was put to the test and he passed. He meant what he said.

Some 2,000 years before a man named Peter laid down his life as well. "I will follow you." But when Peter's "October morning" came, Jesus sensed his unwillingness to keep the commitment he had made three years before. On top of Peter's bold, "I will lay down my life for you," Jesus looked Peter in the eyes and asked, "Will you really lay down your life for me?"

From time to time we need to play out the exchange that took place in the upper room that Passover evening. *Will you really lay down your life for me?* In 1956 I told the Master, "I will follow you, lay down my life for you." Today I ask myself, "Have I, too, cowered at challenges to my faith and failed the Master? Have I at times gone the way of my own choosing and failed to follow him?"

*SONG: I Surrender All*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Master, today I lay my life and all I am before you. I belong to you.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: John 14:23-27*

I don't remember why I chose this verse as my favorite in the entire Bible. I do know that it has been tested over and over as I have walked with people through crisis after crisis. The world of a police chaplain is just that: one crisis to the next.

The best thing I can say about all of those years of crisis is: "I was only a secondary party." It was not my child, killed in the accident. Not my wife whose life was brutally taken from her. I only walked alongside. But I did walk alongside—felt the pain, shared the grief and anguish, and then mingled my tears with theirs.

Jesus was going away and he promised a gift as he left: his peace. Jesus made this promise in the context of telling his friends he was leaving them. What questions and turmoil must have begun to flood their minds? "Going away? What about us? What about our future? This is our life—following you!" The peace of an assured future with the Master had been theirs. It was a rather public and important future, being a part of the Messiah's entourage. Now what?

The greatest threat to their peace would soon come. The brutal death of the one they had believed in, followed, and trusted. Then came the confusion mixed with their grief. No peace for them. Fifty days of turmoil and then Pentecost. Enter the Promised one. Enter the Comforter. Enter the Holy Spirit their peace agent.

This still-present Comforter, this purveyor of peace enters our own turmoil and also brings us peace. For us, he brings peace in heartbreaking loss; peace in tough economic times; peace when peace does not seem possible.

*SONG: Wonderful Peace*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Master, today we will revel in your peace no matter what our circumstance.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: John 13:34, 35*

The other day while I was playing with our 4-year-old grandson, Preston, he very quietly asked: “Poppa, do you like me?” My instant reply, “Preston, I don’t just like you, I *love* you.” As with all of our nine grandchildren there is kind of a magical love that surrounds us. They are a part of our heritage and will be the majority of the valuables we leave behind in this world.

Loving our children and their children is modeling and obeying the Master. Such a heart-piercing, all-encompassing command: “Love one another, as I have loved you.” I know that the emotional well-being of my grandchildren depends on my carrying out this command. I know as well, that the very future of the world depends upon all of us meeting this expectation.

My part of obeying the Master’s command is not very “all-the-world” in its scope, but it does include everyone God puts in my path. To obey the command is to stretch my hand of love to that new guy who shows up at church. His very demeanor screams out, “Who will love me?” Will I? Yes I will.

The question of the ages is: “Who loves me?” Our answer is: “I love you even as the Master loved me.”

*SONG: Jesus Loves Me*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: I am so thankful to be loved. May this be the day when I have the privilege of loving someone who has an urgent need for love.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: John 17:1-8*

The words of the Master in prayer to the Father, and we get to listen in: “They knew with certainty that I came from you...”

Those words, spoken in the garden so long ago, challenge our hearts today. They challenge us with their importance. Jesus puts these words, this fact in a very select category. We easily quip, “Two things are certain, death and taxes.” And now Jesus offers up a third: his very identity. It should now be: Death, taxes, and Jesus. (Not necessarily in that order.)

The words challenge us with their implications. Knowing the identity of Jesus with certainty determines our eternal destiny. Frankly speaking, I have staked my destiny on who I believe he is. He is the Son of God sent by the Father to purchase our redemption. We believe it or we do not.

The disciples came to believe with certainty, through the revelation of Christ’s words and works, that he truly was sent by the Father, the only true God. How gracious of the Father to send the Son. How gracious of the Son to so patiently deal with the disciples and now with us, his latter day disciples.

He reveals himself in the Word, in nature and by his Spirit. He also reveals himself by his followers, by us. (Note John 17:21: “May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”) We know him and we show him to others by the power of the Spirit that lives within us.

*SONG: O, How I Love Jesus*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Father, with sanctified certainty, may I be used today to reveal you to others. May the certain truth of who you are be seen in me.*

—Dan Nolta

*BIBLE READING: John 17:9-19*

On the occasion of my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, the “90<sup>th</sup> Psalm one,” lots of people came and we had a wonderful party in our backyard. By about 8:00 that evening the party was over. By the next afternoon the mess was all cleaned up and except for our happy memories you would never know that anything had happened.

Seventy came and went and here I am, “still in the world.” Now what do I do? Someone wisely wrote: “Here is the test to find out whether your mission in life is finished: If you are alive it isn’t.” There is more of life to come! There is more to do for God!

Whether seven, seventeen, or seventy, there is ample direction as to how we are to live with whatever time we will remain. The Master prayed that we be one, as united as he and the Father. He prayed that we might have the full measure of joy in our lives. That would be joy in the obvious things of life that bring joy, and joy in those things that would seem the antithesis, as Jesus, “who for the joy set before him endured the cross.”

After taking an online quiz that asked such questions as current age; height and weight; exercise and eating habits and so on, I was delivered up a startling answer. It predicted that I would live till 2039...an even 100 years. I thought I would get out of here before that. But, if he still wants me in this world till then, I am sure that he will prepare the way and give me joy in all of it.

*SONG: Day by Day*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, if you are in it, it's ok with me. Bring it on.*

—Dan Nolta