

**John 13:38 + Will You Really Lay Down Your Life for Me? + Series: Cross Examination<sup>1</sup>  
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + Lenten Midweek #2 + 21 February 2018**

How do we prepare for the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection? For centuries, the Christian church has used the season of Lent—the 40 days (not including Sundays) from Ash Wednesday to Holy Thursday—to prepare for the celebration of Christ saving us from sin, death, and the devil. During this season of Lent, we can prepare by asking questions like we used to do preparing for tests in school or how young and old are prepared for membership through the study of questions on what God's Word teaches. So this year during Lent, we're going to study questions not that we ask, but questions taken from the Passion History of our Lord, questions asked by Jesus or his disciples or others. In doing so, we will prepare our hearts this Lent.

Tonight we find Jesus gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room. They were there to celebrate one last Passover meal, but also to celebrate the first Lord's Supper. While they were there, Jesus began to explain very clearly what was about to happen. He spoke of how his suffering and death on the cross would glorify him as the Savior of the world and bring glory to God.

In order for that to happen, though, Jesus would have to leave his disciples to return to his Father in heaven. Understandably, the disciples were quite troubled because of that. They wondered why they couldn't follow Jesus. Simon Peter objected, ***"Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."*** (John 13:37) Peter thought he was being bold, but Jesus knew differently. He asked Simon, ***"Will you really lay down your life for me?"***

You see, Jesus knew Peter's weakness. Jesus knew what was coming. Rather than lay down his life, Jesus knew that Peter would deny even knowing the Lord three times that very night, and that's exactly what happened. That night in the courtyard of the high priest, Peter proved that he was not ready to lay down his life for the Lord. He feared for his life when a servant girl and others in the courtyard poked their fingers at him and said, ***"You also were with Jesus of Nazareth."*** He was afraid and unwilling to lay down his life for his Lord, so three times he denied that he knew Jesus.

Yet before you condemn Peter for his foolishness, take a look at your own life. Have you always been willing to lay down your life for Jesus? You might think to yourself, "Of course, I'd lay down my life for Jesus!" In fact, many of you have even made a promise very similar to Peter's? When you were confirmed either as a teen or as an adult, you were asked a question like this: ***"Do you intend to continue steadfast in the true Christian faith...even to death?"*** You answered, ***"I do, and I ask God to help me."*** With that oath you promised to do what our Lord commands in Revelation 2:(10), ***"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."***

Now during the course of his ministry, Jesus made it very clear to his disciples that following him meant being willing to give up everything, even their own lives for his sake. The Lord made it very clear that all who follow him must treasure him more than life itself. If you look back through the history of the Christian church and even many instances around the world today, you will find times when God's people actually have given up their lives for Christ. That's what we pledge to do when we vow to remain faithful even to death.

Yet have any of you actually been in that situation? Has anyone ever held a knife to your throat or a gun to your head or threatened your loved ones unless you renounced Christ? We haven't been in that situation, but still we fail, don't we? We still fail to keep our promise to lay down our lives for Jesus.

You see, laying down your life for Jesus doesn't just mean giving up your life. It also means living your life for your Savior. The Apostle Paul explained it well. ***"I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."*** (Romans 12:1) Instead of offering ourselves as instruments of wickedness, we are to offer ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness. Instead of thinking that it's my life, my body, my time, my money to do with as I please, I realize that the life I have comes exclusively from God, that he has fearfully and wonderfully made me, and that the blood of Christ has paid for all of my sin.

We are not our own! I am not my own. You are not your own. Everything that you have—time, talents, treasures, body—comes from God. Therefore, you are to live your life to his glory! Our Lord doesn't always call on us to give up our lives for him, but he does call on us to live our lives for him. Paul tells us, ***"We are convinced that***

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a 2004 Lenten sermon series produced by Northwestern Publishing House.

***one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.***” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

...But we haven't always been willing to do that, have we? We want to do what's good and right and holy, but then we find ourselves spending our time willingly distracted from what God wants. We use our money or our gifts the way we want to use them when we want to use them rather than the way God wants us to use them in the different callings he gives to us.

Then our Lord turns to us as he turned to Simon Peter and asks, ***“Will you really lay down your life for me?”*** He looks at all those times when we were unwilling to acknowledge him as our Lord. He sees us struggling to stay in control of our own lives rather than letting his Word guide our thoughts, our hopes, and our lives. He knows how unwilling we are to give our lives for him. With Peter, then, we have to admit that we'd rather keep our lives and live our way instead of living our lives for God. ***“Will you really lay down your life for me?”*** Jesus still requires that of us, but so often in our heart of hearts, we are unwilling to live our lives for him, let alone lay them down for him.

...But unlike us, Jesus was willing. Take a closer look at his question and you realize that he doesn't ask more of us than he was willing to do for us. The innocent Son of God became sin for us. He suffered for us. He endured the cross with its shame and the cold, dark grave for us. Scripture shows us how Jesus willingly laid down his life for us after he had lived his life for us. From his willing surrender in the Garden of Gethsemane to the very end when he called out in a loud voice, ***“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,”*** Jesus was completely willing to lay down his life for us! (Luke 23:46)

As we consider how unwilling we are to give up our lives for God and consider how willing he was to die for us, maybe we should make his question our own. As miserable sinners, who so often refuse to live our lives for our Savior, we look at him during his final days and ask that question. “Jesus, will you really lay down your life for me?” “Yes,” the Savior says, “I will lay down my life for you.” What an amazing answer! He loves us so much in spite of our sin, in spite of our selfishness, in spite of our stubbornness that he lays down his sinless life for us. He takes away our sins. He makes us holy in God's sight.

So how do you respond? Do you simply continue to ignore Christ's claim on your life? Do you continue trying to control your own life and destiny? Or do you remember what the Apostle Paul said? ***“He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him.”*** In view of God's mercy through Christ, we offer ourselves, our lives, our all as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. In view of Christ's willingness to lay down his life for us, we lay down ourselves, our lives, our all at his feet to be used for his glory.

That, my friends, is the sacrifice our Savior wants. That is the sacrifice our Savior deserves. That is the sacrifice our Lord inspires through faith in him. His willingness to give up his life for us makes us willing to live our lives for him and, if need be, to lay down our lives for him. ***“Will you really lay down your life for me?”*** Lord, we have failed to live up to our promises to you, but you laid down your life for us. Help us to live for you! Amen.