



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

Actor, Ally or Accomplice?

Part 2

Notorious Accomplices

John 18.15–27; 21.15–17

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INTRO TO SERIES

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Last week Pastor Pam kicked off this series with a definition of bigotry. She pointed out that bigotry is alive and well in our world, in our country, in even closer to home in our denomination and neighborhood. Bigotry is defined as hate, intolerance, or pre-judgement against any identifiable minority based on things like skin color, nationality, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation and so on. Bigotry exists at many levels of society, from one-on-one intimidation and violence to the face-less systemic injustices that subjugate some while privileging others.

As Christians, following Jesus' way means that we will work for a world where bigotry must end.

Of course you can't look in a biblical concordance under "bigotry" and find scriptures with the word. But the faith connection could not be more clear. Jesus draws near to the so-called unclean and unworthy: lepers and the unwell of body or mind, women, people from different countries, people without status, children. Those who were looked down upon. And of course Jesus' most famous story is about the compassionate, heroic actions of one of those unclean people, a Samaritan. The star of the story is a person of a different religion and race (in their minds anyway). An untouchable. The enemy.

As Christians—if we want to be like Jesus—we are to break down walls of bigotry at every turn. It should be woven into our DNA. Jesus knew that all of us are God's children. And that when one of us is snarled by prejudice or blocked by bigotry, none of us are free. Our fates are woven together.

ACTORS, ALLIES, AND ACCOMPLICES WORK AGAINST BIGOTRY, BUT IN DIFFERENT WAYS.

So, how do we go about it? We've introduced this idea of *Actors, Allies and Accomplices*. Which do you want to be?

2 An **Actor** is someone who is opposed to bigotry much like a spectator at a ball game. We are rooting for things to get better for all people, but like a fan at a baseball game, we're not going to suit up and take the field so we're unlikely to really change the outcome.

An **Ally**, on the other hand, is someone who takes the next step and is willing to move beyond cheerleading to allying themselves with those treated unjustly. We can do this by naming the wrong of a racist joke, educating friends, and seeing people above politics. Like Jesus did. An ally is someone in the group of privilege who usually works *for* (remember that preposition *for*) the oppressed group. In working for (or on behalf) of others, Allies can choose when and how to get involved. To continue with the baseball metaphor, as Allies we put ourselves in the game, but we decide when and what position we are willing to play.

And that's where I want to pick up our scripture, before we get to Accomplice.

STORY OF PETER

Simon Peter. Fisherman, one of Jesus' first disciples, part of his inner circle, founder of the first church. But there was that one time...The scene is this...Jesus has been betrayed and arrested and is being taken in to account to the high priest.

JOHN 18.15–27

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus (after his arrest). Because this other disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard. ¹⁶However, Peter stood outside near the gate. Then the other disciple (the one known to the high priest) came out and spoke to the woman stationed at the gate, and she brought Peter in. ¹⁷The servant woman stationed at the gate asked Peter, "Aren't you one of this man's disciples?"

"I'm not," he replied. ¹⁸The servants and the guards had made a fire because it was cold. They were standing around it, warming themselves. Peter joined them there, standing by the fire and warming himself.

¹⁹Meanwhile, the chief priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ²⁰Jesus answered, "I've spoken openly to the world. I've always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews gather. I've said nothing in private. ²¹Why ask me? Ask those who heard what I told them. They know what I said."

²²After Jesus spoke, one of the guards standing there slapped Jesus in the face. "Is that how you would answer the high priest?" he asked.

²³Jesus replied, "If I speak wrongly, testify about what was wrong. But if I speak correctly, why do you strike me?" ²⁴Then Annas sent him, bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing with the guards, warming himself. They asked, "Aren't you one of his disciples?"

Peter denied it, saying, "I'm not."

²⁶A servant of the high priest, a relative of the one whose ear Peter had cut off, said to him, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" ²⁷Peter denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

Here, we have one of the most famous denials of all time. Did you catch that part at the beginning? They didn't know Peter and so he had the opportunity to take the easy road, to literally warm his hands by the fire rather than be an Actor, Ally or Accomplice. Jesus, meanwhile, stayed true as an accomplice to God.

An **Accomplice** is someone who is willing to take on and disrupt the systems that have concretized. Jesus does this during Holy Week in Jerusalem as he publicly mocks the Roman powers by riding a donkey into town, disrupts the

4 religious powers by turning over the moneychangers' tables and preaches God's availability to all people. Jesus was God's accomplice.

MORE ON BEING AN ACCOMPLICE

Now I know that word accomplice carries a negative connotation. But even though the word is most often equated with criminality these days, the origins of the word are rooted in cooperation. The "com" in **accomplice** is the same one as in the word **community**, meaning together. *Plicare* is to fold. To be an accomplice is to fold with or fold together. To join, fuse combine. *Isn't that was we want to do with Jesus and his way?*

But therein lies the challenge. Because to be Jesus' accomplice often means that we will get our hands dirty to the extent that we just may be labeled as a wrongdoer, a malfeasant. Think about those who were arrested and branded criminal in the civil rights movement, anti-war/pro-peace demonstrators during the Vietnam War, and oh yeah, a guy who was strung up on a cross by the governing authorities for disturbing the peace and breaking the status quo.

How about these folks as accomplices that first group of women and men who broke the law to baptize one another to begin what would become the Church of the Brethren. They were all accomplices with and to one another and to Jesus as they baptized each other and prayed over one another in the river Eder. Today, we are accomplices to Paola and Jordan. It is good to be an accomplice.

Biblically, Jesus was an accomplice to God. The disciples were accomplices to Jesus. The first church in Acts accomplices to the Holy Spirit.

Next week I want to share a couple of challenging stories about being Allies and Accomplices, but we've got some

picnicking to do today, so I'll end with the rest of Simon Peter's story because it's important. As it is with the God we know, Simon Peter's failure is not the end of his story. He got another chance. And this time he was ready.

JOHN 21.15–27

Jesus has been executed and buried. He's appeared to the disciples back in the Upper Room. And now the disciples seem to be back to life as usual. For Simon Peter and several others meant fishing. Suddenly a figure appears on the shore. Someone is shouting to the boat, which from shore is about 100 yards away. *Have you caught anything? Try casting your nets to other side of the boat!*

Suddenly there are too many fish to even pull the nets in. *Who is that guy?! Wait a minute, it's Jesus!* Simon Peter is so excited he jumps into the water and swims a hundred yards to shore. The rest of them haul in the fish, come to shore, and they build a fire to enjoy the spoils. And Peter is given another chance:

After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Master, you know I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

He then asked a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Master, you know I love you."

Jesus said, "Shepherd my sheep."

Then he said it a third time: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

6 Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, "Do you love me?" so he answered, "Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

Three denials turned into three "I love yous" and three invitations to feed and shepherd Jesus' sheep, be Jesus' accomplice. To get off of the sidelines and get in the game. And get in the game he did. Peter went on to be one of the leaders in the church that would change the world. A church that would deconstruct the old rules and prohibitions that kept people from God, a church that welcomed all people in full fellowship.

