Introduction:

Regrets: people responded to the question: “What is your biggest regret?”

- “not telling someone ‘I love you’ until it was too late”
- Not pursuing my dreams
- Believing when I was told I was not good enough
- Telling my family that I hated them, or walking away from my family
- Dropping out of school
- Not speaking up when I experienced abuse
- Allowing fear to keep me from trying something new
- Saying hurtful words
- Believing hurtful words

We probably each have regrets – things that we have said or done that we wish we hadn’t…

things that we wish we HAD said or done but didn’t…

1. Regret is defined as: feeling sad, repentant, or disappointed over (something that has happened or been done, especially a loss or missed opportunity).

Today’s text explain what happened immediately after Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane: How he was tried by the religious leaders and the regrettable situation in which Peter found himself.

Text. Mat 26:57  Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. 58 But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome. 59 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. 60 But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward 61 and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" 62 Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" 63 But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

64 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." 65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. 66 What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered. 67 Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him 68 and said, "Prophesy to us, Christ. Who hit you?" 69 Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. 70 But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. 71 Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This
fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." 72 He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!"
73 After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away." 74 Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Poor Peter. Just imagine how he felt when that rooster crowed… imagine the shame he felt… All of the disciples had abandoned Jesus, but Peter had told Jesus that he would never disown him – and I am sure he believed with all his heart that he would never do such a thing. Now we see him outside weeping bitterly. Feeling shame and absolute regret.

This is a dark moment for Peter – as it was for all of Jesus’ disciples. The feelings of regret are what I believe led Judas, Jesus’ betrayer, to kill himself. Regret was part of why these disciples found it hard to believe the women’s testimony of Jesus’ resurrection just a few days later. I think their failures blinded them to the miraculous redeeming and life-giving power of God to raise Jesus from the dead.

Regret can be crippling. It can cause us to believe that we are not worthy of God’s love or anyone else’s love for that matter. It can lead some to withdraw from relationships and simply try to hide because of the shame that is felt. In the Genesis story of Adam and Eve, it is said that they regretted their disobedience and their response was to try to hide from God. Regret that is not dealt with builds walls of separation that are not meant to exist.

So how are we to deal with our regrets. Of course, some things can’t be changed: we can’t go back in time and avoid our mistakes or make different decisions… but that doesn’t mean that we should just ignore what has happened in the past. Some have said “the past is the past… we just need to move on”. But there is healing in dealing with past mistakes and learning from them.

This past week in Montgomery, Alabama, a memorial to victims of lynching opened. The memorial is meant to shine a light on a dark part of our nation’s history and lift up the names of those who were victims of this injustice. It is also meant to be a place of national and racial healing. In response to the opening of this memorial, a 200 year old newspaper, ‘the Montgomery Advertiser’ reflected on the paper’s historically callous treatment of lynching victims over the last hundred years and confessed “We were wrong”. “We dehumanized human beings and too often characterized lynching victims as guilty before proven so, and often just assumed that they committed a crime.” The editors of the paper confessed that they were “careless in how the paper covered mob violence and the terror foisted upon African Americans."
The Montgomery Advertiser regretted the paper’s dehumanizing of African Americans, so it placed their confession and regret on the front page… literally covering the front page.

This is one response that can help bring healing – to confess. Confession really is good for the soul – it can also bring healing to relationships that have been damaged by intentional or unintentional hurtful words or actions. When our regrets involve hurting someone, confession can be a good place to begin – even if that confession cannot be given to the one who was hurt. I have heard people say, “I wish I had told my parent that I loved them before they died… I just hope they knew that I loved them” – confessing that to someone else can begin to bring some healing to your own soul

Asking for forgiveness may be part of that confession, and if the person is unable or unwilling to offer forgiveness, God forgives. The guilt or shame that often goes with regret does not have to be in your life. God’s forgiveness is complete, and so, by faith we can accept that forgiveness and move on unburdened.

If your regret is based on disappointments or missed or squandered opportunity, realize that God is also in the business of redemption… creating something of value and meaning out of our mistakes. God can and does bring good out of every situation. (hear me on this: I am not saying that everything that happens is part of God’s plan or work… God does not cause people to mistreat others… God does not cause people to sin. But God can take any situation and bring some good out of it – God can redeem our mistakes)

Maybe we have wasted years of our lives – God takes us where we are today, as we are today, and uses our successes and failures for good… leading us into new and exciting places. You see, today can be the beginning of something new when we give ourselves over into God’s hands. Maybe we have failed in relationships – God can heal broken relationships when people are willing, but God can also use those failed relationships to teach us and help us with how we treat and interact with the people surrounding us now. The lessons we learn can also be shared with others who are struggling with similar difficulties.

Do you have regrets? Don’t allow those regrets to weigh you down or negatively affect your relationships. Bring them into the light, confess your mistakes and give them over to God who is our redeemer. Just as in Montgomery, Alabama, it may be necessary to come clean and admit “I was wrong”. It is then that bridges can be rebuilt in relationships and hope can be found for the future.