

Good Friday Reflection
March 30, 2018
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We have just heard the Gospel according to John relating the story of Jesus' passion. This is not the first time we have heard this story, nor will it probably be the last. Christians over the centuries have been sharing this story, or some version of this story because it makes a difference in our lives.

One of the most important or intriguing questions for me asked in John's version of the Passion is:

"You are not one of this man's disciples are you?"

This was asked of Peter three times. How did the maid who was the gatekeeper, the slave of the high priest, and the others know to ask this question? Probably they thought they saw Peter in the garden, or maybe it was his clothing or his accent. I think there's more to it.

I'd like to share a story from my family. This story is 100 years old passed down on my mother's side.

My grandfather, Jean-Baptiste Dion was drafted to serve in World War 1. He and my grandmother agreed to wait until he returned from the war to be married. He didn't want her to be a war widow. My grandfather was sent to France to fight in the trenches. Because he was a native French speaker, he was valuable to the men in his unit. But that's another part of the story.

Here's the story we tell.

One day some of the men in my grandfather's unit were called up to go to the front lines. My grandfather was not one of them. Word came back that the enemy would be using gas that day. My grandfather noticed that one of the men had left his gas mask behind. This man, Max Markman, lived in the same town as my grandfather, yet I'm not sure if they would have ever met before the war. My grandfather was Catholic and Max was Jewish. But that's another part of the story. My grandfather who had not been sent to the front line, without hesitation or fear for his own life, thinking only of this other man's safety, took Max Markman's gas mask to him. My understanding is that this was unheard of. And, as the story goes, yes, the men were gassed, but Mr. Markman survived because of that gas mask.

Time goes by and both men returned home from the war to Attleboro, MA, my hometown. My grandfather, Jean-Baptiste Dion and my grandmother Eva Bernadette Lepage were married. Yet it is said that my grandfather never spoke about the war to anyone in the family, especially not to his children (this included my mother).

It is Mr. Markman and his family who retold the story of how his life was saved by my grandfather that day in France.

Max Markman became a business man and prominent citizen in Attleboro. His name is found on important public places around town.

My grandfather worked as a toolmaker for the jewelry industry in my hometown. And during the depression when he lost his job he worked for the Public Works Department.

Both my grandfather and Mr. Markman died many years ago. But to this day whenever Mr. Markman's daughter sees my mother, she says thank you – your father saved my father's life. My mother always gives a shy little smile when she tells me this part of the story.

Today we heard of Jesus's giving his life – that's part of a much bigger and extraordinary story, that makes it possible for us to be here today as we are. At the same time, I think my grandfather did something extraordinary, and I challenge each of us to find the ways we can give of ourselves as unselfishly for others.

As for that question: "You are not one of this man's disciples, are you?"

We know that Peter, who was first asked that question, grew into his faith enough to answer, yes.

I think my grandfather answered in his own humble way with a simple action.

And when someone asks you: how will they know to even ask you that question?? How will others recognize you as a follower of Christ?