

Third Lenten Service

Text: Luke 22:54-62

⁵⁴Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. ⁵⁶A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." ⁵⁷But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said. ⁵⁸A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied. ⁵⁹About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." ⁶⁰Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." ⁶²And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Theme: The Wound of Denial

"I don't know the man!" I cannot begin to imagine how much those words must have hurt Jesus. Peter was one of the first disciples whom Jesus called. Even before Jesus began His ministry, Peter's brother Andrew brought him to Jesus at the Jordan River. Sometime later Jesus came to Peter in Galilee. Peter and his companions had been fishing all night, but they didn't catch a thing. When Jesus told them to put the net down in the deep water (something that made no sense), they caught so many fish that the boat began to sink. When Jesus saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Jesus said, "Don't be afraid, from now on you will catch men." (Lk 5). It was Peter who briefly walked on the water with Jesus. He made the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He was one of the three disciples, who were a part of Jesus' inner circle. It must have cut the Lord deep inside when He heard this beloved disciple deny Him with curses. But as we hear tonight, this is another wound that Jesus bore for us.

I. Why do we deny our Lord?

It is because we often trust in our own power. When we do that we are tossed back and forth like the waves in the sea. Jesus had told Peter during the Last Supper, that he would deny Him. He told Peter, "*Simon, simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.*" Peter answered, "*Lord I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.*" Then the Lord made His prediction that before the rooster crowed, Peter would deny Him three times. After the meal, they went to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus told Peter, James and John to watch and pray with Him, but they all fell asleep. After the Lord woke them for the third time, Judas came. Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant Malchus. Jesus healed the man, and all the disciples fled. However, Peter had a change of heart. He began to follow from a distance. He was so bold that he went right into the courtyard of the high priest and sat with the others at a fire. But then he fell. It began when a little servant girl looked at him closely and said, "*This man was with Him.*" A little bit later another person recognized him and said, "*You are one of them.*" Finally, John writes that a relative of the man whose ear Peter cut off recognized Peter and said, "*Certainly this fellow was with Him for He is a Galilean.*" Three times Peter denied that he even knew Jesus. Finally, he even did it with curses. Why did Peter fail so badly? He thought that he was strong even to withstand any temptation. He trusted in his strength and will-power, rather than

to watch and pray.

We fall into that same temptation. The strength of our faith often rests on our will power and how we feel at the time. There are times when we feel so close to the Lord. We would never deny Him as our Savior, but it just takes something small, and our faith goes into free-fall. We go back and forth like the leaves blowing in the wind. A heart that trusts in our own strength and our own faith will soon fail when the time of testing comes.

Too often we also put ourselves in bad situations. It is very interesting that Peter went to the home of the high priest. The Lord never told the disciples to follow Him after He was arrested. In fact, He told them that they would all fall away on account of Him. You can imagine what Peter was thinking. He started to run with the other disciples. Then he had a change of heart. He had to go and defend his Lord. (That is a very dangerous thought when we think that we have to defend God.) He followed right to the home of the high priest. Then Luke writes, *“When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard, Peter sat down with them.”* He mixed right in with the people who had just arrested Jesus. How did Peter ever think that His faith would stand strong in such a situation?

Yet, don't we do the same thing? Do we ever find ourselves mixing in with those who are our Lord's enemies, who not only don't believe in Him, but they hate Him. They mock Him. They have nothing good to say about His church. We also find ourselves among those who have no regard for our Lord's salvation. They want their pleasure now. It doesn't matter how sinful those pleasures are. Just like Peter we sit down with those who have no regard for Christ. They would rather watch or play sports on Sunday morning. They would rather give their money to the casino rather than for our Lord's work. They despise our Lord. We sit in their company. We might even think that they will never notice, but if we are a follower of Jesus, the question will eventually come, “Wait, a minute, you go to church, don't you?” “Aren't you a Christian?” “Aren't you a member of a Lutheran church?” Before we know it, we answer, “Well, yes, but I don't take it that serious.” or “Me?! not Me!” We might even find ourselves cursing and using language that God's people should never use to make the point that Christ isn't all that important to us. The devil's worst venom is scorn. When we are made fun of because of our faith, it is very hard to withstand. We need to be very careful that we do not put ourselves in the middle of temptation like Peter did.

II. Denial is a deep wound for both us and Christ.

It cuts deeply into our hearts. I can't image how horrible Peter felt when he denied Jesus with curses, then suddenly there was Jesus staring straight at him. His heart sunk. He was filled with guilt. Jesus said that he would do it. Peter assured the Lord that he would die with Jesus before he would ever deny Him. Just as the Lord said, he failed miserably. Peter ran outside, and he wept bitterly. It is a miracle that he did not go and kill himself as Judas did.

The denial of our Lord also cuts deeply into our own hearts. At the time it was the easy thing to do. It takes a second to say, “I don't know Him.” The remorse cuts a wound in our hearts that never completely heals. How could I have denied my Lord who saved me?

That is another wound that Jesus has born for us. At the Last Supper Jesus told Peter, *“When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”* (22:32) Jesus forecast Peter's denial, so that He

could also tell Peter that forgiveness was there waiting for him. When Jesus hung on the cross, He also bore the guilt of our sin of denial. It's interesting that while he was suffering, so many people denied Him, He remembered many of those people on the cross. He remembered those who crucified Him and prayed for their forgiveness. He remembered the repentant thief on the cross and promised Him paradise. He remembered His mother and saw to it that she would be cared for. He denied no one. As He suffered He remembered us and gave His life for the forgiveness of our sins. When Jesus rose from the dead, it's interesting that in Mark's Gospel the women were told to tell the disciples and Peter that Christ had risen. Peter was singled out. Jesus wanted Him to know that His sin was forgiven.

Peter would be given other chances to confess His Lord. But the power of the Holy Spirit, He would no longer fail. In Acts 4 Peter was brought before the Sanhedrin himself. He was asked by what power he healed a man. He boldly answered, *"It is by the name of Jesus Christ...Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* Many years later Peter would have a choice. He could live and deny His Lord again or He would die. He chose death by crucifixion rather than deny the Lord who would never turn His back on him.

Christ, bore our sin of denial also. We come to Him with repentant hearts in the times when we have denied Him, and he freely forgives those sins. Like Peter, His Spirit also fills our hearts with faith and courage, that when the time of testing comes again, we can boldly confess Christ as our Savior and the Savior of the world.

Denial is a very deep wound, but one which Christ heals. May His Spirit enable us to watch and pray that we will not fall into this temptation. When we do, may He also help us to look to Christ for healing and forgiveness, just as Peter did.

Amen.

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