

And Lead us not into Temptation

5th Lenten Service

Text: Luke 22:54-62 (NIV)

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: Tempted to Deny His Lord

Peter was a man with a target on his back. The devil sought his prey, and he found an easy target in Peter. He thought that he would be able to destroy Peter's faith and devour him. Jesus spoke about this at the Last Supper when He said, “*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back strengthen your brothers.*” (Lk 22:31) Peter remembered this episode when he wrote in his first letter, “*The devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.*”

What made Peter an appealing target for the devil? What saved him when the devil had him in his grasp? Tonight I would like to look at those two questions with you.

I. What made Peter an easy target for the devil.

It was simply that he was too self confident. Right after Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper the disciples got into an argument about who was the greatest. Peter was probably one of the main participants. After all Jesus often said great things about him. He told Peter that he would become a fisher of men. He renamed Peter after his confession of faith. Peter was one of the three disciples that Jesus took with him at special times. He certainly felt that he was probably the greatest of the disciples. But then Jesus said those words, “*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back strengthen your brothers.*” Peter was crushed, but he assured Jesus, “*Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.*” Jesus answered, “*I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know Me.*” Peter was absolutely sure that he would remain strong. There was no way that he would fall into this temptation. In fact, he was so sure of that, that he

would confront that temptation directly.

This led Peter to do two foolish things: First, he ventured out all by himself. After Jesus was arrested all of the disciples fled. Yet Peter and John ventured to the courtyard of the High Priest. John writes that he was known to the High Priest and was able to get into the courtyard. It was John who brought Peter in. We don't know what happened to John, but suddenly Peter was standing all by himself without any of our Lord's disciples around him.

This can be an easy temptation for us to fall into. We figure that we can stand on our own two feet, We don't need our brothers and sisters in Christ. "I can worship God just as well all by myself." We think that we don't need to come to worship, Bible Classes or fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we venture out on our own, before we know it we feel all alone in our faith.

Second, Peter also put himself in a situation where he should not have been. Jesus never told him, "Peter, I want you to follow me right to the courtyard of the High Priest." But Peter put Himself in a situation that was very dangerous for his faith. He went and sat down among the people who were just in the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest our Lord. It began with a little servant girl who was looking closely at Peter. You can imagine how Peter's fear grew as this young girl was staring at him, and suddenly she says, "*This man was with Him.*" Peter denied it. John tells us that one of the men was a relative of Malchus, the man whose ear that Peter cut off. He also recognized Peter. Again he denied it. Finally, he denied his Lord with curses.

This is a very big trap when we are overly confident. We put ourselves in places and situations where we should not be as Christians. We are among those who mock our Lord and who love to engage in behavior that we know is wrong. We know that there will be a lot of temptation there to deny our Lord by what we say and do, but we figure, "I'll be okay. I know that my faith is strong. I will never deny my Lord. I'm not going to fall into temptation." It's at those times when the devil is ready to pounce. He knows just how vulnerable we are. Before we know it, we have fallen into great sin or denied our Lord. Like Peter, we realize what we have done, and it grieves us. Peter's faith failed, and our faith fails when it is in our strength. St. Paul also exhorts us, "*So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*" (1 Cor 10:12)

Now the devil had Peter in his grasp. He was going in for the kill. Peter was sure that he was strong, but he became such easy prey. He was like a sheep that went astray from the flock, figuring that it could defend itself from the lion. Now the devil had him and wasn't about to let go. That is the situation that we find ourselves in when we think that we will be strong. Before we know it, we have fallen into temptation and the devil has us in his grasp. We suddenly realize how weak and foolish we were.

II. What saved Peter when the devil had a firm hold on him?

He confessed his weakness. It says in verse 62, "*He went outside and wept bitterly.*" Now he realized just how weak he was. He knew how dire the situation was. What does the sheep do when it is caught? It begins to bleat. It calls out to its shepherd. I'm sure that this is what Peter did at that point. He prayed. He confessed to God that He had failed. He called out to His Lord for mercy.

That is exactly what we do when we have fallen into temptation. We weep over what we have done, but we also call upon the name of the Lord. We pray for His mercy and His strength. As Peter writes in His first letter, We humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, that He may lift us up in due time. We cast our anxiety on Him because He cares for us even when we have failed. (1 Pt 5:6,7)

The Lord gave him the look of mercy and grace. Only Luke reports that as soon as the rooster crowed, Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter. A few years ago I did a Bible Study on this text at an area university. I asked the students how Jesus probably looked at Peter. The first student responded that He was mad and disgusted. I don't think that Jesus looked at him that way at all. It was a look of compassion and mercy. The Lord was already telling Peter, "I forgive you." When Jesus went to Calvary, He also paid for this sin. When He rose from the dead, He told the women specifically to tell Peter that He had risen. When He appeared to the disciples in Galilee, Jesus told this disciple who had fallen so far, "Feed My lambs." But Christ didn't let Peter go. He pulled him from the mouth of the lion. He forgave Peter his sin. Jesus prayed for Peter, and unlike Judas, Peter's faith didn't fail. He sought the Lord's forgiveness.

When we fail our Lord, He doesn't let go of us either. Confession and repentance are so important. Our faith doesn't fail when we confess our sin, and Christ forgives us. He also paid for all of our sins on Calvary. He rose from the dead as our Savior. He also uses imperfect people like us to carry out His will when we trust in His strength for us.

Peter's story in the story of every Christian. So often we fall into temptation because we thought that we were strong enough to resist it ourselves. Realize how weak you are against temptation and flee from it. When you do fall as Peter did, confess your sin. Humble yourself under God's might hand, and He will lift you up with His forgiveness, grace, and mercy.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
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