

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday In Lent, March 7, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 516, 517:2-3, 144, 159:1-2, 54.

Lessons: Psalm 1, 1 Peter 5:5-11, Mark 14:66-72

Sermon Text: Luke 22:54-62

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

After Jesus led his disciples to Gethsemane, he again warned them and especially Peter about what was going to happen. *“You will all fall away, Jesus told them, for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.’ Peter declared, ‘Even if all fall away, I will not.’ ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘today--yes, tonight--before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.’ But Peter insisted emphatically, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ And all the others said the same.”* Mark 14:27-31 (NIV) Peter was very strong-willed and out-spoken and he was constantly making up his mind about what Jesus ought to do, and how he ought to do it. But Jesus did not go Peter’s way. However, Peter did disown and deny Jesus. Today we look at

THE DENIAL OF PETER

- 1. Peter walked right into the devil’s lair, into temptation, into the hands of Satan.**
- 2. Three times he denied even knowing Jesus.**
- 3. But that was not the end for Peter. He repented.**

Scripture tells us: *“Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. 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.”* Matthew 26:57-58 (NIV)

Why? Why would Peter go into such a dangerous place? His leader, his teacher, his Savior had been taken prisoner and was now at his first trial. All Matthew says is that he wanted *“to see the outcome.”* Could he have been thinking of his promises to even die for Jesus and now Jesus was taken prisoner? Peter followed *“at a distance.”* Love prompted him to follow, but fear kept him in the distance.

Peter had tried to fight with the sword, using an earthly weapon to try to protect or rescue Jesus. But that didn’t rescue Jesus, because, as he later told Pontius Pilate: *“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”* John 18:36 (NIV)

Peter obviously felt sorry for what he had done. After all, he was one of Jesus’ apostles who ran away from Jesus after he was captured. But we can see his sorrow from his sincere repentance after publicly denying he even knew Jesus.

Matthew says he followed *“to see the outcome.”* He sat down with the guards! Why did he put himself into such temptation? This is exactly what Jesus again warned all of his disciples and especially Peter against in the garden of Gethsemane: After praying, Jesus *“returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Simon,’ he said to Peter, ‘are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.’”* Mark 14:37-38 (NIV)

You know what temptation means. It is something that attracts, especially with the promise of pleasure or reward. It is the desire to have or do something that you know you should avoid. It is putting yourself into danger. Temptation is everything that would lead us into sin.

We find many examples in the Bible of temptations. Here are just a few: When Abraham and Lot came to Canaan, Lot chose the best land and it was at Sodom, the great city of sin. David invited Bathsheba into his palace and they committed adultery.

Each person has his and her own sets of weaknesses and we must all flee temptation instead of walking right into it as Peter did. We should be careful not only where we go, but also where we take our friends. When we find our path closed we should carefully consider whether it may be a kind of intervention from God to save us from harm.

And where do we find strength to fight temptations? Jesus himself used the very Words of God to fight the three great temptations in the wilderness. Remember Jesus is our true high priest, and Scripture tells us: ***“we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.”*** Hebrews 4:15 (NIV)

But Peter made himself at home right there. ***“When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them.”*** Luke 22:55 (NIV)

Then come his verbal denials of Jesus, the things we remember most. ***“Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, ‘This man was with him’”*** Matthew 26:69 (NIV) – with Jesus. Now she wasn’t an important person, that is, not someone who could arrest Peter or would have any authority to get him in trouble. This seems like just a casual comment. She wasn’t a guard, or one of the Sanhedrin, one of the Jewish ruling council, or a priest. She was ***“a servant girl”***. Did Peter think he could just brush off the accusation? Sweep it under the rug and ignore it and forget it? Did he think that the people around him would just let it go?

But he doesn’t want to endanger himself. ***“But he denied it. ‘Woman, I don’t know him,’ he said.”*** He brushes it off and moves away from her.

Evidently the people in the courtyard around Peter discussed Christ and his capture, heaping ridicule and mockery upon Him.

In all this Peter was silent; he did not wish to become known as a follower of Jesus. Peter denies all connection with Christ, and all knowledge, and even does it with oaths.

We ought not to be found in the midst of mockers. If inadvertently we get into their company, remember that to be silent when they mock God is to deny Christ.

Matthew tells us: ***“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.’ He denied it again, with an oath: ‘I don’t know the man!’”*** Matthew 26:17 (NIV)

He moved away from that first servant girl. He was uncomfortable but he didn’t just leave the whole place and this terrible temptation. He went toward the gate, probably turned around, and stayed in the courtyard of the high priest. We don’t know how she knew, but it is quite an accusation. Could she have seen him hanging around Jesus in Jerusalem? She doesn’t speak to him like the first girl did, but she tells others. ***“This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.”*** She knew who was on trial and she names Jesus precisely. News about this trial at night had obviously spread. In order for the Sanhedrin, the council of 70 leaders of the Jews to be gathered, no doubt many people had to spread the word and go to their homes to tell them to come to the palace of the high priest on this night.

Nothing we do is really secret, as much as we might like it to be. Today we have another example from Scripture, but haven’t you seen this same kind of thing in the movies and on television? Nothing is really “secret”. Someone always knows about the crime. Someone always finds out.

“After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, ‘Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.’ He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know this man you’re talking about.’”“ Mark 14:70-71 (NIV) Matthew tells us: ***“He denied it again, with an oath: ‘I don’t know the man!’”*** Matthew 26:72 (NIV) ***“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.’ Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know the man!’” Matthew 26:73-74 (NIV)

Now others make the accusation. Here is more of what might be called in a crime drama ‘corroborating evidence’. But this isn’t just some fictitious drama. This is the real trial of your Savior, Jesus Christ.

But Peter falling into temptation and sin is not the end of this history lesson. He repented, and Luke uses these words: *“Peter replied, ‘Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!’ Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The 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.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.”* Luke 22:54-62 (NIV)

The boldly confessing disciple has become the shamefully denying disciple.

All this happened at night, and maybe Peter had thought that he wouldn’t be recognized. Since the first crowing of the rooster usually takes place long before dawn, the more emphatic declaration of Jesus that Peter would actually deny him three times before the cock crows twice should have shaken him up out of his dream of self-complacency. But he was still stubborn, contradicting Jesus vehemently: Though it should become necessary to die with him, Peter most surely would not deny the Lord. And the other disciples seconded this bragging talk and agreed with Peter, instead of imploring the Lord for grace and power in the hour of temptation.

Peter falls terribly, but by repentance he gets back up to serve Jesus. A look of love from Christ melts him into tears. He knew that repentance was the key to the kingdom of grace.

Let us watch and pray, as Christ directed Peter, so that we do not deny Jesus in any way or at any time. If we do fall it will be largely because we do not stand boldly for Jesus, and fight for the truth and purity of the Word of God and all it teaches.

It was the look of Jesus that brought Peter to a realization of what he had done. No doubt Peter then also remembered the warnings he had received. How earnestly had Jesus warned him! And how earnestly he warns us through his Word!

Peter showed his penitence: *“He went outside and wept bitterly.”* True repentance, which is sorrow for sin and faith in Christ, will not lead to despair, but to a godly sorrow. True repentance is a change of mind and heart. True repentance is sincere sorrow over sin and a desire to stop sinning. The Bible also uses the word in a broader sense to mean sorrow over sin and faith in the forgiveness of sins, and a desire to stop sinning. This is what Peter manifested when he wept tears of repentance.

Let us not be ashamed to repent of our sins. If God the Father is willing to forgive, and did so much in order to be able to forgive all our sins, we should always look to his love. James tells us: *“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”* James 1:12 (NIV)

What are you going to remember from today and take with you? Have you ever been in Peter’s position? A time when you have been uncomfortable to be identified as a Christian? We can certainly humbly take home the words of Saint Paul to the Corinthians: *“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”* 1 Corinthians 10:12 (NIV) *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”* 1 Corinthians 10:12 (KJV)

Can you imagine how Peter felt the next day seeing Christ suffer and die on the cross? Can you imagine how Peter felt until he was assured that Jesus rose from the dead? Can you imagine how Peter really felt until Jesus told him in the days after his resurrection: *“Feed my lambs.”* *“Take care of my sheep.”* and *“Feed my sheep.”*? John 21:15-17 (NIV)

In Peter we see someone who may have learned from this occasion to submit to God’s will, but his words remind us to remember the words from Peter’s first letter to be sober and vigilant, to *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”* 1 Peter 5:8-9 (NIV) Lord, deliver us from evil! Amen.