

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 21, 2010

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Hymns: 516, 324:1-4, 323, 321, 50.
Lessons: Joshua 24:14-28, 1 Peter 5:5b – 11, Luke 22:54-62.
Sermon Text: Mark 14:26-31, 53-54 and 66-72.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The facts surrounding the event in our sermon text are pretty clear. On the way to Gethsemane, Peter had 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."* Then Peter followed the captured Jesus right into the courtyard of the high priest. While he was there, he fulfilled Jesus' prophecy and denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed twice. St. Mark writes *"And he broke down and wept."*

We learn from our text that *"They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together. Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire."*

He was sitting at a fire right in the courtyard of the high priest, where Jesus' trial was going on, warming himself. Isn't this an interesting picture? Peter was warming himself at a fire on that cool spring evening, as if he were warming himself at the very fires of hell. And he was probably thinking it was just fine to be there! He had placed himself right in the midst of the enemies of Jesus. Didn't he think about putting himself in danger this way, or was he thinking how he might be able to rescue Jesus? How many of us haven't heard our parents or grandparents say 'If you play with fire, you will get burned'? But we knew better. We would be careful and we wouldn't get hurt. Sure. That's the way it always worked out, right? Of course not. We got burned one way or another. We put ourselves in danger, in harm's way, and we were harmed despite all our good intentions and what we thought we could do and couldn't do, and what would happen to us. That leads us today to talk about

PETER'S CONFIDENCE THAT HE WOULD NEVER DISOWN JESUS

1. Jesus warns Peter.
2. Peter was sure of what he thought he could and would do.
3. Peter denied Jesus three times in a very public way.
4. Peter *"went outside and wept bitterly"* in repentance.

Peter had been warned. Luke tells us *"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." But he replied, "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."* Luke 22:31-34. In the upper room, Jesus had warned Peter by repeating his given name twice. Simon, Simon I have prayed for you. Notice that Jesus does not call him Peter, Peter, the name that suggests a "rock man". Simon Peter, of course, boldly argued with Jesus.

Satan had already seduced Judas but that did not satisfy him. The devil wanted all of the disciples. Jesus is really warning all of the disciples. However Jesus especially has to warn Peter. Notice that Jesus does not prevent the testing, the tempting, the sifting, by Satan, but he prays for strength that Peter and the others be sustained. But Peter refuses to take the warning of Jesus seriously. He contradicts the positive statement of Christ and repeats his readiness to die for him. *"Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."* Peter

boldly and brashly tries to tell Jesus he can rely on him. Peter was surely sincere about this, but Jesus knew that instead of dying for him at this time, Peter would lie and deny him in order to save his own life.

"Then Jesus answered, 'Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!'" John 13:38. In the King James Version we hear Jesus saying **"Verily, verily!"** Make no mistake, Peter. It is going to happen despite what you think and say. Jesus tells us how quickly and how great this fall will be. Peter would completely disown his Lord and Master, not by silence, but by three loud and forceful declarations.

Two disciples followed Jesus at a distance. From his description of himself, we conclude that the other disciple was John. John apparently was **"known to the high priest."** John also had Peter let in to the courtyard of the high priest.

Peter went in and sat down with the servants around the fire warming himself. The atmosphere of the courtyard was hostile toward Christ, but Peter acted as though he belonged there. His overconfidence had returned to him. St. Matthew writes that Peter **"sat down with the guards to see the outcome."** Matthew 26:58.

Notice carefully how Satan attacked Peter. Matthew tells us **"and a servant girl came to him. 'You also were with Jesus of Galilee,' she said. But he denied it before them all. 'I don't know what you're talking about,' he said."** Matthew 26: 69-70. The devil first used one of the servant girls of the high priest. She came to Peter and said out loud, so others could hear: **"You also were with Jesus of Galilee."** Should Peter have been surprised at being accused of being one of Jesus' disciples while right in the midst of his enemies? Should he have been "hiding" right in the midst of Satan's workers? Of course not.

At other times Peter would've been proud to acknowledge discipleship but on this night he had already denied his master with his acts – running away from Jesus. Now Peter was going to deny Jesus with his words. Peter had to answer quickly, so he lied. **"I don't know what you're talking about,"** and so Peter's first denial is made, a public denial.

Peter didn't leave the fire immediately. But before long **"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: 71-72. At the very least, he wanted to get away from someone who might recognize him. Perhaps he wanted to leave the palace but before he could get away he was drawn into the second denial. At this point the cock crowed the first time but either Peter did not hear it or he did not pay attention to it. If he was trying to get out, Peter was unable to slip out unnoticed. Another servant girl saw him and pointed Peter out to those close by, accusing him of being a follower of Jesus. So they asked him 'is this true?' He denied it and Scripture says for emphasis he added an oath.

Now another man identified Peter as a follower of Jesus. **"One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, 'Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?' Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow."** John 18:26-27. Now there seemed to be accusations from all sides. Peter, trying to lie himself out of a difficult situation, had gotten himself in deeper. It was no longer merely a question of confessing Christ, but of threatening Peter's own life as well as Jesus' life and Peter lacked the courage to come clean. **"He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, 'I don't know this man you're talking about.' Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.' And he broke down and wept."** He tried to cover up one lie with another. And Scripture says for emphasis he added an oath. Perhaps Peter was slipping into an old habit from his fishing days.

Yet in a way Peter played his role well. How can a person better show that he does not belong to Christ by denying and then resorting to cursing that he doesn't know Jesus?

Peter's vehement denial, sealed with an oath, set the first accusers back for a while. But he decided to stay in the courtyard. Just when he was beginning to feel secure, he was attacked again, about an hour later. This time the accusation is even stronger. **"About an hour later another asserted, 'Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.'"** Luke 22:59. Despite Peter's vehement denials, the suspicions of the bystanders still existed, and they confronted Peter because of his Galilean accent, a different accent than the Judeans had. To climax the charges that Peter had been lying, a relative of Malchus, whose ear Peter had cut off in the garden, identified Peter as having been in the garden with Jesus. Now Peter was really on the spot. His silence now

would condemn him as a disciple and as a liar and would put him in great danger. So we have his vehement third denial. The once strong disciple had now become a coward.

Before his accusers could attack Peter again, we read "***Immediately the rooster crowed the second time.***" This time Peter heard the crowing of the rooster, but that alone was not enough to rouse him out of his sin. "***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.'***" Luke 22:61. A look was the only means of communication possible between Jesus and Peter at this time, but it was enough. That look struck home.

And Peter remembered. Suddenly he saw the enormity of his sin. But he also remembered the Savior's loving warning, and he was led to repentance, "***And he went outside and wept bitterly.***" Luke 22:62. Peter could no longer remain on the scene of his sin and shame. It seems that he had no difficulty getting out of the courtyard. Peter's pent-up emotions broke loose and he wept bitterly. He made no attempt to excuse his sin or to cover it. He was overwhelmed by its enormity and repented of it. Peter's repentance can in no way be attributed to any act of his own. It was due alone to divine grace.

We must remember that this lesson is part of the overall picture of Jesus' suffering and death. Peter is not the important character here, Jesus is. Peter's denial was as much a part of Jesus' suffering as the agony in Gethsemane and the pain which he endured in the judgment hall and upon the cross. Peter's denial was a conscious and deliberate rejection by one of his own, from the most intimate circle of his disciples. What shame and disgrace! First Judas connived with the enemy, and now Peter disowns Jesus publicly, where his enemies see it and are given cause to mock Jesus for it.

Jesus knew that this betrayal would happen. He had foretold it and had warned Peter, but now Jesus was experiencing it and tasting the bitterness of it. These outright denials surely were stabbing the heart and soul of the Savior.

We must always remember the difference between Peter's weeping bitterly and Judas weeping after he betrayed Jesus. We might say, as many have, that both were contrite, that is, sorry for their sins. But the difference is Peter had faith that Jesus could forgive him his sins. Judas had no faith in the forgiveness of sin, and so he went out and committed suicide by hanging.

But we must see in Peter a warning for all of us. He was where he should not have been. He relied on his own strength, which failed him. He didn't believe every single Word Jesus had spoken to him. He thought he could stand on his own. But he failed.

In his sin and failure to witness Jesus he repented. Peter was one of the first of the disciples to run to the empty tomb. Can you imagine how he felt after Jesus' death? He was truly sorry he had disowned and betrayed his Lord. Now that his Master was dead, how could he ever know that he could be forgiven? But he still had faith in the forgiveness of sins. Peter's repentance found forgiveness and even reinstatement as a disciple in Jesus' words to him after the resurrection to "***Feed my lambs.***" ..."***Take care of my sheep.***".... "***Feed my sheep***" as we read in John 21: 15-17.

God used Peter in many ways and many times after the resurrection, proving Christ's prophecy in Luke 22: "***But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.***" Luke 22:32. Perhaps you will recognize that more readily from the King James Version: "***But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.***" We have Peter's life and his letters, written by inspiration of the Holy Ghost to guide us. May we learn from Peter and be warned unto eternal life! Amen.