

Sermon for Midweek of Lent 4

Date: March 30, 2022

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 59:1-3, 12-13

Epistle Reading: 1 Peter 5:6-10

Gospel Reading: Luke 22:54-62

Sermon Text: Luke 22:54-62

Sermon Title: Return from Denial

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 118:19–29

Hymns:

- LSB 431 – Not All the Blood of Beasts
- LSB 608 – Lord, to You I Make Confession
- LSB 449 – O Sacred Head, Now Wounded
- LSB 542 – When I Behold Jesus Christ
- LSB 777 – Grant Peace, We Pray, in Mercy, Lord
- LSB 784 – Take My Life and Let It Be
Break Your Hearts (*Tune: LSB 512*)
- LSB 437 – Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



Return from Denial



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Text: Luke 22:54-62

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

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Grace to you, and peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The evening's events had run off the rails...

It started off so well! The camaraderie of being with His friends; the warmth of their fellowship; the joy of being with their Master and hearing all He had to say... It was all wonderful. One of those moments that freeze in your memory, and make you happy when you recall it, or reminisce about it.

It all started out so well, but then it started to slip. It started when Jesus made that comment about one of them betraying Him. That sent a ripple through the group. The people at the table began to look with suspicion at each other, wondering who would do such a thing. Who could do such a thing?

That's when the argument started about who was the greatest. So stupid! As usual, though, Jesus turned it into a teachable moment. The things He said! Like:

The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them,
and those in authority over them are called benefactors.
But not so with you.¹

He encouraged them to do everything upside down.

Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and
the leader as one who serves.²

For Peter it really got awkward when Jesus leaned over, with a troubled look on His face and said Satan had demanded him, but Jesus had prayed for him.

Peter was shocked to hear it and said:

Lord, I am ready to go with You both to prison and to
death.³

Jesus knew better. He explained Peter would deny he knew Jesus three times, all before the rooster crowed.

If that weren't enough when they went to the Mount of Olives for Jesus to pray, the disciples fell asleep while waiting. They couldn't help it. They were worn out after everything that had happened, and they were still trying to sort out in their minds all that Jesus had said was coming.

Still that's not all. It got even worse. Soldiers showed up, with Judas leading them. The chaos that followed was unbelievable. That servant of the high priest got his ear cut off and it was all about to unravel, but Jesus shut it down. He even

¹ Luke 22:25-26

² Luke 22:26

³ Luke 22:33

healed the guy's ear! That kind of stuff usually grabbed the crowds attention, but not this time. They arrested Him, and dragged Him to the house of the high priest.

Peter couldn't help himself. He followed. He had to see what was going to happen. He had to do something, even if it was just to follow along and see it for himself. As he stood in the courtyard Peter could see Jesus with the Council inside. It didn't sound like it was going well. In fact, Jesus was barely talking. He just kind of stood there and took it all.

It was getting cool, so Peter had moved closer to the fire to warm himself, but he wasn't really paying attention to what was going on around him. His attention was focused on what was going on inside. He didn't notice the girl sitting next to him, studying his face, until she blurted out, "This man also was with Him."⁴

Peter jumped a bit. He turned to her, and for the first time Peter took stock of where he was, sitting with roman and Temple guards. He looked around at the crowd gathered in that courtyard and realized these folks weren't all friendly. He hoped to shut her down without drawing any more attention to himself. He looked at her and quietly said, "Oh, no, ma'am. I don't know Him."⁵ That seemed to satisfy her, so he returned his attention to the events unfold inside.

There was more arguing. Raised voices and accusations were being shouted across the room. Peter shivered. He wasn't sure whether it was from the cold, or from a sense of fatefulness. That woman had moved on, but a young man had taken her place at the fire and was looking at Peter. "You're one of them too!"⁶

Peter was a little irritated at these interruptions while he was trying to focus on the trial. He needed these people to quit breaking in on his concentration. He was trying to hear what was happening to Jesus. "Man, I am not,"⁷ he said. The guy seemed to take that at face value and walked off, but Peter noticed him a little later whispering with a group of men off in the corner of the courtyard. Still, his attention was focused on Jesus and the events inside.

Time passed. The night was moving into early morning. He couldn't tell exactly what was happening, but it didn't seem good. There was a lot of yelling. The high priest had been carrying on for a while and was obviously angry.

That's when it happened...

From across the courtyard the voice rang out. As soon as the man began speaking, Peter knew it was about him. He was standing and pointing at Peter:

4 Luke 22:56

5 Luke 22:57 *[Paraphrased]*

6 Luke 22:58 *[Paraphrased]*

7 Luke 22:58 *[Paraphrased]*

I'm telling you, this guy was with Him! I heard him talking earlier, and he is definitely from Galilee; his accent gives him away.⁸

All eyes turned on Peter. He wasn't sure how to react, or what to say. What if they realized he really was with Jesus? Would they arrest him too? He didn't know, and he didn't want to find out. He figured if he responded aggressively, maybe they would stop it.

"Man, I do not know what you are talking about!." He spit each word out, hoping this guy would just back down. The courtyard crowd grew quiet, and Peter heard a rooster crowing in the distance. Peter just glared at his accuser, and then turned to see what was going on inside.

Jesus was, just then, being escorted to another building. He was up to his neck with the Council's false accusations. Slowly He turned, and made eye contact with Peter. His eyes were accusing, and sad.

Peter remembered what Jesus had said, about denying Him three times before the rooster crowed. Tears welled up in Peter's eyes as he pushed through the crowd. He had to get out of that place. He couldn't face Jesus after what he had just done. He was humiliated. He was a failure. He was so lost...

How often do we do the same thing? How often do we fail to acknowledge our faith in public because of concern about how people will react. How often do we join the crowd in mocking another believer, even if it is with our silence, because you don't want to be seen as one of them. You deny the Holy One, who died for your sins, without realizing you have done it.

When you see it, when you suddenly look into that proverbial mirror, the guilt can be overwhelming. It may be hard to step into church, knowing what a hypocrite you've been. Can such a wretch like me be saved?

The answer, to that vastly great and important questions, is simple: Yes.

After His resurrection, Jesus confronted Peter and that denial. He did it with a question asked three times: "Do you love Me?"

Peter responded affirmatively every time.

Jesus restored Peter. He said, "Then you've got work to do. Tend My flock, feed My sheep, and build them up."¹⁰

8 Luke 22:59 *[Paraphrased]*

9 Luke 22:60 *[Paraphrased]*

10 John 21:15-17

You see, Jesus has already dealt with the denial. He took it to the cross, along with all the other sins we have all committed. All of them. From the fruit in Eden and all the sins since. The sins of the whole world.

So let me ask you Jesus question? “Do you love Him?” You are here. That outward action says you do. “Do you love Him?”

Then you’ve got work to do. The work of the Church, the work of each and every individual member has: Share this Good News. Tell other people about it. Don’t shrink from claiming your Lord and Savior in public. He has called you to return to the Lord, return from your denial. He does this because He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. He does this because He relents over disaster. Your true repentance, your heart-felt remorse for your sin ensures your salvation is secure. You are a forgiven child of God. He said so when He said, “It is finished.”¹¹

Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**



11 John 19:30