

Mid-week Lent 2

March 1, 2023 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Peter

You could make the argument that I was the most popular disciple, but that probably because I was the one sticking my foot in my mouth most of the time. My parents did not name me Peter. They called me Simon. It was Jesus who called me Peter. Peter means “a rock” although my faith wasn’t always rock solid. My father was a fisherman and I was raised to be a fisherman too. In fact, I was doing pretty well with my fishing business, but then Jesus asked me to be one of his disciples. At first, a lot of people, including my wife, said I was foolish to leave my business behind and follow Jesus. I admit he did not have any money to give me but he gave something that money can not buy.

I’m known for shooting off at the mouth and speaking before thinking. Granted, I did react quickly at times, but you could never accuse me of not being sincere and trying my hardest. There is one event though, that I’ll never try to excuse away. You know it well. Jesus even warned me about it but I was too proud to think it could happen to me. I should have listened.

We were in the Garden of Gethsemane. Suddenly there was a huge group of soldiers all around us, led by Judas, that traitor. I was not going to deny Jesus. I was ready to die right then and there. I took out my sword and started swinging but I only managed to chop off one poor fellow’s ear. And Jesus even healed that. I thought for sure Jesus would walk away like he did at other times when people tried to seize him. When I realized that he was letting himself get arrested, I got scared. I couldn’t believe it when Jesus told the soldiers to let us go and they did. We ran for cover before they reconsidered it. Hidden behind some bushes we watched the soldiers take Jesus away. John came up to me and said he knew of a friend who could get us inside the courtyard where Jesus was on trial. It was risky but we just had to know what was going to happen to Jesus.

It was pretty cold that night. I stood by the fire to stay warm. There were a lot of soldiers there too. I was nervous. Everything was going OK until that maid opened her mouth and said that I was with Jesus. Put yourself in my shoes. I could have said, “You’re right.” and been arrested

instantly, or I could have lied and lived. Tell me that you would not have done the same thing I did.

I went to a different fire closer to the gate. I started talking with those soldiers there and tried to blend in. A different maid also pointed me out as a follower of Jesus. The soldiers stopped and looked at me. I was scared. I tried to be tough and I even used God’s name to say that I did not even know who Jesus was. About an hour later they started pressuring me. My northern Galilean accent gave me away as a disciple of Jesus. I was petrified now. For sure they would arrest me. I tried bluffing again. I cursed and swore that I did not know Jesus. The drift of what I said was, “I would rather suffer in hell than to be associated with Jesus.”

I am not proud of what I did, but before you point your finger at me, take a look at your own life. Haven’t you often denied Jesus too? Have there been times when you were hoping no one found out that you go to a church? Maybe you were at a party where the liquor was flowing as quickly as the dirty jokes and you did not leave. Just like me, you stayed with Jesus’ enemies and denied that you knew him. I am sure there have been times when you heard people talking about abortion or homosexuality or mercy killing or living together outside of marriage and you just kept your mouth shut. You were afraid of what others would say if you spoke up and said, “I do not think that such things are good.” You hid your faith. I’m also sure you know people do not go to church and don’t know about Jesus, but you don’t invite them to church or tell that what Jesus did for them because you were afraid of how they would respond and what they would think of you. You denied Jesus just like I did. In fact, every one of your sins is a denial of Jesus as the Lord of your life. I know what it feels like to know you are sinful. Guilt can eat away at your soul.

The soldiers knew I was bluffing. Jesus knew it too. He was being led across the courtyard to another room at the same time the rooster crowed. Suddenly I remembered what he said about me denying him three times. He turned his bruised and bloodied face toward me and looked right at me. I’ll never forget that look in his eyes. It was not anger. It was sorrow and disappointment, like when you see your children doing something that they know is wrong. Yet, his look was also love. It hit me hard. I blew it. I sinned. I let him down. I was a failure.

I am not ashamed to tell you that I left that courtyard and cried my eyes out. I wanted so desperately to tell him I was sorry. I wanted to make up

for what I did wrong. All along I kept hoping that Jesus would perform some miracle and walk away from all those soldiers and we could be together again, Jesus and his disciples. It never happened. Later I realized that he could have done that if he wanted to, but he let himself be captured, beat up, and killed because I needed him to suffer and die for me. If Jesus had escaped like I wanted him to, he could not have taken my sins away and I would not be in heaven now.

Certainly you have sinned and denied your savior like I did. Through his Word Jesus still looks at you and makes you realize your sin. Do not try to excuse it away. Don't blame it on other people who were around you. Don't blame it on circumstances. Do not say the devil made you do it and do not say you couldn't control yourself. Admit it. You are a sinner. Tell Jesus you are sorry.

On Easter morning, when the angels told the women that Jesus was not there, they also said, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter." He singled me out because he knew that I, especially, needed to hear the good news of forgiveness and new life through his resurrection. After Jesus rose again he appeared to me all by myself. At the time I could hardly believe that he was alive and I wanted to look at him and talk to him to make sure, but I did not want to, if you know what I mean. I did not want to look at Jesus and talk to him because I was afraid of what he was going to say. But he looked at me and smiled and said, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven. I died to take away your sins and now I rose so you can live with me in heaven."

Later, Jesus asked me three times if I loved him. I knew what he was getting at. I denied him three times and he gave me the chance to say "I love you Lord." three times. He showed me nothing but love and forgiveness. I did not deserve it. Not at all. But he gave it to me. That's what we call grace. There's a neat poem I heard that I really like:

When I say "I am a Christian," I'm not bragging of success.
I'm admitting I have failed and need God to clean my mess.
When I say "I am a Christian" I still feel the sting of pain.
I have my share of heartaches, so I call upon His name.
When I say "I am a Christian" I'm not holier than thou,
I'm just a simple sinner who received God's good grace, somehow!

You know what? I never denied Jesus again. Motivated by his love I stood up and preached about him on Pentecost morning and on many other occasions. At times I was thrown in prison. Sometimes, I was beat

up. Finally I was killed for preaching about Jesus. But that did not matter. What mattered is that Jesus loved me and saved me. That is why he came down to this earth. That's why he let himself be arrested. That's why he put up with all the abuse. And that's why he let himself be killed.

Even though I am somewhat of a famous figure, I'm really not that special. You see, it was not just love for me that kept Jesus on that cross. It was love for you too. You may have denied him, but he took those sins to the cross too. The glorified Lord Jesus also says to you, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven." It doesn't matter how public or private. It doesn't matter if it was just once or a continuing sinful habit. It doesn't matter if the sin was a disgusting crime or an evil thought. All of your sins are completely forgiven. That's what Jesus meant when he said, "It is finished." You are already completely forgiven. He will even give you other opportunities to witness to others about him too. And motivated by his love, I know you'll tell others about Jesus just like I did. I'm looking forward to meeting you in heaven one day when we can talk about it. Until then, God bless you all. Amen.