

I.N.I.

Second Sunday in Lent: STEADFASTNESS

March 4, 2012

Mark 14:54, 66-72 II Peter 3:17

In Christ Jesus, who through His suffering and death has paid for the punishment and guilt of all of our sins, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This morning we add two new objects to our Lenten display---the ROOSTER and the TEARS. When we think of these two objects in the passion history of our Savior who comes to mind immediately? Peter! This morning we will focus our attention on these two objects and the lesson we learn from them:

A Lesson on STEADFASTNESS!

In our Passion reading on Ash Wednesday we heard our Savior warn Peter very clearly, **I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, THIS VERY NIGHT, BEFORE THE ROOSTER CROWS TWICE, YOU WILL DISOWN (DENY) ME THREE TIMES.** To which Peter in his confident, self-assured way declared, **EVEN IF I HAVE TO DIE WITH YOU, I WILL NEVER DENY YOU.** Little did Peter realize the serious nature of the Lord's warning words or of His promise, at least at that time.

We read Mark 14:54, 66-72...

Jesus said, **YES, I AM.** Peter said, **NO, I AM NOT.** In the face of death Jesus declared **I AM THE SON OF GOD.** In fear of death Peter declared **I AM NOT ONE OF THIS MAN'S DISCIPLES.** How different from the bold and daring Peter just a short time earlier who in the Garden grabbed his sword, ready and willing to die for his Lord, and cut off the ear of one of Jesus' captors. Now he is filled with panic, fear and a desire to save himself at all costs. What happened?

DON'T WARM YOURSELF AT THE FIRES OF JESUS' ENEMIES! IT'S DANGEROUS! When Peter struck out with his sword in the Garden he was surrounded by his enemies but Jesus and his fellow disciples were also there with him. Now he had put himself into a situation where he was all alone. In reality he was disobeying His Savior. When Jesus was bound and carried away all of the disciples fled in fear. After Peter and John regained their composure they decided to follow at a distance. Why? Was it love and concern for Jesus that compelled them? Maybe. Maybe it was also a case of bravado, machismo. Whatever it was it was misplaced. Jesus had said to his captors, **I HAVE TOLD YOU THAT I AM HE. THEREFORE, IF YOU SEEK ME, LET THESE GO THEIR WAY.**

Peter and John should have concluded that they were not to follow along. Jesus had warned all of them of the impending danger of that night. They should have realized that they were placing themselves into a situation that was far too dangerous for them, not only to their bodies, but also to their souls.

The Lord Jesus had said to Peter, **SIMON, SIMON! INDEED, SATAN HAS ASKED FOR YOU, THAT HE MAY SIFT YOU AS WHEAT.** That should have been enough warning for Peter to not put himself into temptation, alone, surrounded by Jesus' enemies. But remember this was Peter, the man who walked on water, the man who confessed **YOU ARE THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD.** The man who was the spokesman for the other disciples, the self appointed leader. He never thought, **LET HIM WHO THINKS HE STANDS TAKE HEED LEST HE FALL.**

We know what happened. John who knew the High Priest was able to talk the woman doorkeeper into letting Peter into the courtyard. Peter entered, curious yet scared, brave yet trembling. No doubt there were many things racing through his mind. How could all of this be happening? Their Lord, who had raised the dead, healed the sick, walked on water, changed water into wine, calmed the wind and the waves, who was transfigured and shone like the sun on the mountain, who was declared the King of

Israel just a few days earlier was now arrested like a common criminal. Even though Jesus had clearly told His disciples these things would happen, they still did not understand what He had meant.

As Peter is standing there in the courtyard with these disturbing thoughts going through his mind a servant girl comes up to him by the fire. We all know how uncomfortable it is to have someone staring at us. Imagine how Peter must have felt. Trying to hide his identity, he feels the burning glare of this woman's intense look and then she says **YOU ALSO WERE WITH THAT NAZARENE, JESUS.**

From one pair of eyes, suddenly there now were many eyes focused on Peter. He changed from an insignificant bystander warming himself by the fire to the center of attention. All eyes fell on him. What did this woman say? This man here, is a follower of that man Jesus who was just brought in bound for trial. Ears perked up, heads turned, eyes stared. Peter had little time to think. He had little time to plan, to do anything. This was the last thing he thought would happen. Gripped with fear and embarrassment the words quickly came out; **I DON'T KNOW OR UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT.** Luke adds that Peter also said, **I DON'T KNOW THE MAN.**

Peter, you don't know the man for whom a few hours earlier you had vowed to go into imprisonment and death? Peter, you don't know the man to whom you had said, **LORD, TO WHOM SHOULD WE GO? YOU HAVE THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE?** How flimsy his avowed courage and steadfastness now appeared! A question from a mere servant girl, not a squad of soldiers armed to the teeth, was all that it took to strip Peter of all his supposed courage and bravado.

As so often happens one sin leads to another. In an effort to get away from the crowd Peter goes to the gateway and another woman, the very doorman who had let him in says, **THIS FELLOW IS ONE OF THEM.**

Now others begin to say the same thing. Again Peter denies knowing Jesus, this time with a curse. The rooster crowed. **DON'T WARM YOURSELF AT THE FIRES OF JESUS' ENEMIES! IT'S DANGEROUS!** What a shameful, cowardly denial! Frantic with fear for his own life, Peter accentuated his denial with an oath. He sank to the level of a worldly person who curses and swears.

It settled the crowd for awhile. But we are told by Luke about an hour later the crowd of people around the fire took up the accusation again. One of them said, **SURELY YOU ARE ONE OF THEM; FOR YOU ARE A GALILEAN, YOUR SPEECH BETRAYS YOU.** And another one, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, looked at him and said, **DIDN'T I SEE YOU WITH HIM IN THE GARDEN?**

Satan's sifting process of Peter was well into motion. Peter was no match for this wily foe. He had put his trust and confidence in himself, in his faith, in his courage and had not listened to Jesus' words of warning. He did not despair of himself, admit to his own weakness and turn to Jesus for strength. He tried to solve the problem himself and failed miserably.

Satan was much too clever to attack Peter where his strength lay: proud, heroic, impetuous character that he was. If he had been called upon to assume a hero's role, like in the Garden, he may have responded differently. But Satan gets him away from his Savior, away from fellow believers, all by himself and fells the mighty Peter with a seemingly harmless servant girl and an accusation that struck fear into his heart.

Peter again denies knowing Jesus, again denies that he is one of His disciples and again calls down God's wrath upon him if he even knew this man. Peter can't even say His name, Jesus. One man has surmised that Peter's words could have been something like this: **I WOULD RATHER SEE MYSELF DAMNED THAN TO HAVE BEEN SUCH A GODLESS SCOUNDREL AS TO HAVE STOOD WITH OR ASSOCIATED WITH THIS MAN.** The rooster crowed a second time.

It was at just that same time that Jesus was being moved from one trial to another through the courtyard and He looked at Peter as He passed by. With that look of sorrow, rebuke and also love, together with the rooster crowing, Peter remembered the Lord's words. Filled with repentant sorrow, Peter rushed out of the courtyard and cried bitter tears of repentance.

How could this have happened? How could a faithful disciple of Jesus do such a thing? Because he, like all of us, is but dust, a frail human being. We are weak, sin-filled mortals who are easy prey to Satan. That is why this same Peter, years later wrote to you and to me these words, **BE SOBER, BE VIGILANT; BECAUSE YOUR ADVERSARY THE DEVIL WALKS ABOUT LIKE A ROARING LION, SEEKING WHOM HE MAY DEVOUR.** On our own we are no match for Satan. That is why Peter also wrote to us, **THEREFORE HUMBLE YOURSELVES UNDER THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD, THAT HE MAY EXALT YOU IN DUE TIME, CASTING ALL YOUR CARE UPON HIM FOR HE CARES FOR YOU...RESIST HIM, standing STEADFAST IN THE FAITH.**

A lesson on STEADFASTNESS!

Our second text reads, **YOU THEREFORE, BELOVED, SINCE YOU KNOW THESE THINGS BEFOREHAND, BEWARE LEST YOU ALSO FALL FROM YOUR OWN STEADFASTNESS, BEING LED AWAY WITH THE ERROR OF THE WICKED.**

The word **STEADFAST**, literally means **A FIRM HOLD**. Other meanings are **TO SUPPORT, TO ESTABLISH, STRENGTHEN, CONFIRM, TO SECURE FIRMLY**. Peter needed to learn this. During his trial in the courtyard his eyes of faith were not fixed upon Christ, his grip of faith was not clinging securely and firmly to Jesus and His Word, he lost his grip, his support and spiritually came crashing down.

But there was One whose eyes were securely, firmly fixed upon Peter, his Savior's eyes. Even as Jesus was being ridiculed, beaten, whipped, mocked and spit on His thoughts were on His beloved disciple there in the courtyard who was denying even knowing Him. What amazing love! That is why, it was not by chance, but by Jesus' planning to be going past Peter at that very moment so that His look to Peter would restore him and remind him of His words to Peter; **BUT I HAVE PRAYED FOR YOU, THAT YOUR FAITH SHOULD NOT FAIL; AND WHEN YOU HAVE RETURNED TO ME, STRENGTHEN YOUR BRETHREN.**

What a fearful warning and yet what a beautiful assurance this Lenten lesson teaches us this morning. Satan too knows our every weakness. He tempts us when we think we are the strongest. He lays seemingly insignificant trials and temptations in our path to trip us up, to lead us to think that we can handle it ourselves. We are then led to trust in ourselves, to handle our own problems, to think lightly of our sins, and often end up denying that we know Christ by the way we think, speak or act.

How often haven't we denied knowing our Lord and Savior when we get so busy that we just cannot come consistently to His house to hear His Word, or spend time in His Word on a daily basis with our private home devotions?

How often haven't we denied knowing our Savior in the way we have acted at work or school; going along with the immoral stories and jokes, talking like the ungodly talk, gossiping about our neighbor like others do, not helping others when we know they need it, or cheating on homework and tests. Have we denied knowing our Savior in our relationships with our girlfriends or boyfriends in sexual matters; acting like the world in these areas of our faith life?

When we hear this lesson again of Peter's denial we had better not shake our heads too hard or "tsk" too loudly; for when we compare our thoughts words and deeds to God's unchangeable Law, His Commandments, we also see our denials of our Lord everywhere we look.

That is why Peter says in our second text, **YOU, THEREFORE BELOVED, SINCE YOU KNOW THESE THINGS BEFOREHAND, BEWARE LEST YOU ALSO FALL FROM YOUR OWN STEADFASTNESS---LEST YOU LOSE YOUR FIRM HOLD ON CHRIST---BEING LED AWAY WITH THE ERROR OF THE WICKED.**

Experience is a powerful teacher. Peter experienced the painful sifting of Satan. He learned the lesson of placing confidence, trust and courage in oneself, in one's own strength. He also experienced the never ending love of His Savior who called Him back from his failure. Who better to lay upon our hearts and minds this morning the admonition, warning and blessed assurance to keep our hearts and

minds focused upon Christ and His Word.

MY SAVIOR STILL LOVES ME! What a blessed, humbling thought that must have been in Peter's pain-filled repentant heart. That same truth, **MY SAVIOR STILL LOVES ME**, will also strengthen our grip and keep us holding firm to our most precious treasure; everlasting life in Christ Jesus.

Very often this repentance includes the shedding of tears. Tears of sorrow for what we have done to hurt our Savior when we are led to see our miserable sins. Tears of sorrow, for we know that even though our Savior loved us so much that He willingly went to suffer and die for us, we fail and fall so very often and love Him so little. Tears of sorrow when we realize that we too have denied our Savior in our words and actions. But there will also be tears of joy as the Holy Spirit leads us to know that Jesus never once disowned us and then directs us to look alone to the cross of our Savior and see in that shed blood our only hope that cleanses us from all of our sins and to look to that Word that keeps us **STEADFAST**.

The blessed assurance is that our **STEADFASTNESS** comes only from the One who alone can establish, strengthen and confirm us safe and secure in His Word which is unchangeable and sure. May these objects, the **ROOSTER** and the **TEARS** remind us of our own frailty, of the need for godly repentance, of our Savior's forgiving love and the power of His Word for our strengthening in faith and **STEADFASTNESS** in hope.

Amen.