

I.N.I.

Fifth Sunday in Lent
April 7, 2019
Luke 22:54-62

In Christ Jesus, who renews us with His forgiving love, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The Passion Place we visit this morning is a place we visited a couple weeks ago in our second mid-week Lenten service—the Courtyard. The event—Peter's denial. It was a moment of self-revelation for Peter. Peter sees who he really is in his denial: a lost sinner. But, by God's grace, Jesus also shows Peter who He is: his Savior. This morning we will meditate on these two pictures—Peter's denial and Peter's Savior. By doing that we will grow in trust of our Savior, who enters places of denial and turns them into places of renewal in His love.

As we consider this event we see more and more of Peter's life being stripped away. It's kind of like watching a crack in the foundation slowly spread, bringing the whole house to ruin. Back in the late 80's Saginaw had a heavy 13 inch rain overnight. Basements were flooded all over the city, but one house had it even worse. The water broke through a crack in the foundation wall, which then became a larger split and eventually the whole corner of the basement wall collapsed and that side of the house drooped down. It was sad to see. From a crack to a collapse! That is what happened to Peter.

The servant girl is the first to reveal the crack. She mentions the relationship between Peter and Jesus. **"THIS MAN WAS ALSO WITH HIM."** she says (Luke 22:56). She puts Peter and Jesus together with these words. But Peter denies it. **"WOMAN, I DO NOT KNOW HIM"** he says. A crack starts in the foundation. He denies knowing his Lord. When your relationship with Jesus is broken, it doesn't take long for everything else to collapse.

From there, we move to Peter's relationship with Jesus and the disciples. Someone says, **"YOU ALSO ARE OF THEM."** (22:58) But Peter said, **"MAN, I AM NOT!"** So, we have Peter and Jesus and then Peter and the disciples grouped together and Peter again denies knowing Jesus, by denying he was one of the disciples of Jesus. The crack gets wider.

Finally, someone offers the bigger picture. He says, **"SURELY THIS FELLOW ALSO WAS WITH HIM, FOR HE IS A GALILEAN"** (22:59). We move from Peter and Jesus, to Peter and the disciples, to Peter and all of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee. Peter's response **"MAN, I DO NOT KNOW WHAT YOU ARE SAYING!"** As we said when your relationship with Jesus is broken, it doesn't take long for everything else to collapse.

Peter now has a moment of painful self-revelation. He hears the rooster crow, he sees Jesus' face, and he remembers Jesus' words. Jesus knew him better than he knew himself. Peter boldly, vehemently said he would follow Jesus to prison and to death. But instead, he denies he ever knew Jesus. This is indeed a moment of painful, spiritual self-revelation. By our own might, we are unable to follow Jesus. For as we know salvation is not dependent on what we do for Jesus. It never has been, and it never will be. And, if we ever rely on our own strength rather than Jesus, we've entered into a place of denial.

That is what really makes a denial. Not so much the drama of having other people question us about Jesus but the simple nature of our relationship to Him. Whenever we rely on our own strength instead of Jesus, a crack shows up in our foundation of faith and we enter into a place of denial. Think about our places of denial. They may not be as dramatic as Peter's. But they are still places of denial. It could be a place of honor in the church. We are founding members of the congregation. It could be a place of great leadership within the church. It could be the frequency and fervor of our devotional life. Satan can get us to look at these things: our years of

membership, our spiritual leadership, our attendance in church, our time spent in Bible study and prayer, and slowly lead us to think that we are strong in the faith because of our own doing.

Look at Peter in the garden. He at first boldly stuck out with his sword. Then he fled in fear. So we too may become a bit bolder in our witness. We speak out at work, sharing our disgust with this world's sinful lifestyle. We speak up at church meetings. After all, people should listen to us; we've been members around here for years. And, as we think we are growing stronger and stronger in the faith, we actually are ignoring the crack in the foundation because we are relying upon ourselves.

There are many ways of denial. You can deny Jesus by saying you never knew Him—clearly, emphatically, right in the middle of a courtyard—or you can deny Jesus by saying you know Him, loudly, emphatically, self-righteously, but all the while forgetting it is His work in your life, not your work for Him. You look like a Christian. You act like a Christian. You do all of the things that a Christian does. But there is a crack in the foundation. You're relying on your own power, your own achievements, your own faith, and there is a crack between you and Jesus. And soon, the whole foundation will collapse.

Thankfully the Lord through His Word leads us to realize that we cannot follow Him into prison or death by ourselves, on our own. We are led to see that we are weak, that we are sinful, and that there is no spiritual health in us, and all we can confess is that we are lost in sin and cannot set ourselves free.

But that is where the other picture comes in. The picture of Peter's Savior! In the midst of our failures, Jesus is and remains the one who takes away our sins. Our salvation does not depend on how much we can do or bear for Jesus. Instead, it depends on what Jesus has done and bears for us. Our forgiveness does not depend on what we do or say for Jesus. It rests securely on what Jesus has done and says for us. In the face of Peter's denial as His disciple, Jesus doesn't deny Peter, but continues to be his Lord and Savior. While Peter goes out to weep bitterly, Jesus goes on to suffer for his disciple who is weeping. It is His work, His love, His mercy that overcomes our sins. As we said, Jesus knew Peter better, than Peter knew himself. And Jesus knows you and me better than we know ourselves. He sees our denial. He sees our sin, and yet He continues to go to the cross. We are not saved by giving our lives up for Jesus; Jesus saves us by giving up His life for us for the forgiveness of our sins. When Peter is caught in the act of denial, Jesus continues in His act of love.

Jesus comes to us in the most embarrassing and awkward of moments. He does not wait until we've got it all together or when we have overcome our temptations and fought our demons and conquered our sins and achieved our goals. No. He comes to us while we are struggling. He comes to us when we confess our failures, our denials, our sins. He comes to assure us that **BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH, AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES; IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD, NOT OF WORKS, LEST ANYONE SHOULD BOAST.** (Eph. 2:8–9). Jesus and His Word is the one firm foundation in our life.

Unlike us and every believer, Jesus comes to us with a love that never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and throughout all of our tomorrows. Time passes and our life is filled with change. We change and move from our work to our home, from church to our recreation, from a garden to a courtyard, and yet wherever we are, Jesus' love never changes. In every place Jesus remains the same. He is the one who forgives our sins and saves our souls.

Even at the end of our life, after death and the grave, we will be raised to find Jesus to be the same. The one who went to the cross to die and pay for our sins and who rose from the grave for our salvation. In those times when we are faced with a painful self-revelation of our sinfulness, may we ever do as Peter did, look to our Savior. Nothing can remove us from our Savior's arms.

He died for us. Trust in His love, live in His Word, pray in His name, and know that He will never deny us.

Filled by the Spirit, Peter wrote to the churches, and his words continue to speak to us today. **BUT YOU ARE A CHOSEN GENERATION, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, HIS OWN SPECIAL PEOPLE, THAT YOU MAY PROCLAIM THE PRAISES OF HIM WHO CALLED YOU OUT OF DARKNESS INTO HIS MARVELOUS LIGHT; WHO ONCE WERE NOT A PEOPLE BUT ARE NOW THE PEOPLE OF GOD, WHO HAD NOT OBTAINED MERCY BUT NOW HAVE OBTAINED MERCY.** (1 Peter 2:9).

In the certainty of our salvation through Jesus, may we go forth as God's own special people, redeemed and renewed, to proclaim this same message to a world in such great need of His love.

**Jesus enters into our moments of painful self-revelation
and brings about His spiritual renewal.**

Amen.