

I.N.I.

Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 13, 2016
Mark 14:27-31

In Christ Jesus, who knows us better than we know ourselves, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Even if it's not intentional, we spend a lot of time talking about ourselves. Someone may be telling us about the time they did this or that and we interject by telling them when we did that same thing. Or someone may tell us what they like or dislike and we jump in and tell them what we like or dislike.

But how well do we really know ourselves? The renowned philosopher Socrates said there is no greater gift than to know yourself. Well, it's not the "greatest" gift, but there is real value in honestly assessing who we are. But how do we do that? Often our opinion of ourselves is way off. The Bible says in Jeremiah 17:9 **The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?**

Other people many times know us better than we know ourselves. The best way to learn about ourselves is not to look in a mirror, but to open our ears. The one who knows us best of course is our God who created us in our mother's womb and we would do well if we listened to Him tell us what we are.

Well this morning we hear another of our Savior's "I Tell You the Truth" statements that reveals to Peter and the rest of the disciples that Jesus knew them far better than they knew themselves.

I Tell You the Truth . . . You Will Deny Me.

I. Heed His warning

Peter would have done well to do just that, heed Jesus' warning. But he thought he knew himself so well, better even than His Lord and Savior. Picture his chest out and his head held high as he walks with his brothers, probably in the lead right behind Jesus, to the Mount of Olives. But he really had no reason to be confident of his circumstances along this path, because his whole world had been turned upside down in the last couple of hours.

It started earlier that evening with the foot-washing ceremony. He wasn't going to let his Lord wash his feet. That was a servant's job. But when his Lord said that he would have no part with Him if he did not, Peter was forced to come to grips with what we call servant leadership---Humility!

Then the Passover celebration came--that traditional ceremony and meal that Peter had been celebrating every year since he was a child. It was like clockwork. Bitter spices, lamb, unleavened bread, and wine. But then Jesus turned that all upside down by talking about a "new covenant" and how this bread was His body and this wine was His blood. Something really big was happening that was shaking up Peter's life. Yet, he seems to be his old, confident, assured self as he walks down the dark path to Gethsemane. Little did he know the darkness, the spiritual darkness, he would be walking into that night. But he could have

and he would have known if he had only listened to the One who knew him better than he knew himself.

It all began with Jesus quoting Scripture like He had done many times before. Yet, it's a rather strange text that Jesus picks for his post-Passover devotion. Listen again to the text Jesus picks from the prophet Zechariah, **'I WILL STRIKE THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP WILL BE SCATTERED.'**

Is that the kind of message you'd expect to hear on the highest festival of the church year? "You're all going to fall away." No! In fact, Peter was insulted. "Hold it right there, Jesus. *Even if all the others fall away, I will not.*"

Peter had just celebrated the Passover and confidently was saying, "Jesus, you don't know me as well as you think. I know myself better." And that's when Jesus says His "verily, verily", **"I tell you the truth . . . TODAY, EVEN THIS NIGHT, BEFORE THE ROOSTER CROWS TWICE, YOU WILL DENY ME THREE TIMES."**

Quite the warning! This is not a spiritual storm watch but a blizzard warning that Jesus gives. "Today—tonight—you will deny Me not once, not twice, but three times." But it's like Peter has his fingers in his ears saying, "I can't hear you. I can't believe what you're saying Jesus. **"IF I HAVE TO DIE WITH YOU, I WILL NOT DENY YOU!"**

We all know how the story ends. Later that night, around the campfire in Caiaphas' courtyard, Peter curses and swears that he doesn't even know this man Jesus. Not once. Not twice. But three times. **"I DON'T KNOW THE MAN!"** And most every year we hear the story, we think, "Peter, you heard the warning. But you ignored the warning. You fool! You should have listened."

Could the same be said of us? How often don't we puff out our chests and confidently say, "Don't worry." Don't worry! I'll be ok, just watching a movie with my girlfriend alone in her parents' basement. Nothing will happen.

Don't worry! I'll be ok; it's not a real sleazy bar and its just a few drinks.

Don't worry! I'm just skipping church for a week or two while we need to do these important other things. I'll be back soon.

Don't worry! This joke is just meant to be funny. Nobody will be offended and no reputations will be tarnished.

Don't worry! It's just a computer screen, make believe, a fantasy world, not like I'll follow through on these desires.

Don't worry! It's just a friendly wager. It's only a little bit of money.

Don't worry! It's just flirting. It doesn't mean a thing.

Don't worry! I know Jesus will forgive me; He always does.

Don't worry! I'm a strong Christian.

I wonder how many "don't worries" a week, a month, or a year later turn into a whole bunch of worry and misery. We think we know ourselves so well. We think we're so strong spiritually. We've grown up with Jesus. We'll never fall. We're confirmed. We read our devotions. We go to Sunday services and Lenten services. We go to a Christian day/high school.

"Don't worry" is what we tell our parents, our spouses, our teachers, our friends, and worst of all, ourselves. Yet our Savior, the One who knows us best, warns, **THEREFORE LET HIM WHO THINKS HE**

STANDS TAKE HEED LEST HE FALL. (1 Co 10:12) WATCH AND PRAY, LEST YOU ENTER INTO TEMPTATION. THE SPIRIT INDEED IS WILLING, BUT THE FLESH IS WEAK. (Mt 26:41)

Whether it's our Christian pedigree or the way we've seen ourselves resist temptation in the past, it is also easy for us to put our fingers in our ears when God sounds warnings through His Word or just ignore His Word and think, "I don't need to hear those warnings."

That's what Peter thought. Let me rephrase that: that's what Peter, the spokesman of Jesus' disciples, thought. That's what Peter, the one who walked and talked with Jesus, thought. That's what Peter, the one who walked on water with his eyes on Jesus, thought. That's what Peter, the one who declared Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God, thought. And it's that Peter who, because he closed his ears to the warning of His Lord, found himself ill-prepared and not ready for the temptations he faced later that night.

Don't be like Peter. Don't miss the warnings that Jesus sounds in your life today. Don't miss him say, "I tell you the truth . . . you will deny Me." **Heed His warning but also...**

II. Hear His promise

Do you know what the real tragedy was? Peter didn't just miss the warning. When he boldly declared his confidence, concentrating on what he was or wasn't going to do, Peter missed a beautiful promise of what Jesus was going to do. Did you hear it? Or did you miss it too?

Maybe our ears also missed those loving words of Jesus. For those of you who have heard this Lenten story for years, you could have summarized this section of Scripture for me. Jesus said, "Peter, you're going to deny me." Peter says, "No way." Jesus says, "Oh, yes. I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows you're going to deny me three times."

If that's all we summarize, then we would have missed one of the most beautiful, timely promises. After saying **ALL OF YOU WILL BE MADE TO STUMBLE BECAUSE OF ME THIS NIGHT** and **'I WILL STRIKE THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP WILL BE SCATTERED,'** but before Peter made His protest, Jesus made this promise, **"BUT AFTER I HAVE BEEN RAISED, I WILL GO BEFORE YOU TO GALILEE."**

Wow! Jesus says the disciples would scatter. He declares, "I know you're going to sin. But I'm going to win." **AFTER I HAVE BEEN RAISED, I WILL GO BEFORE YOU.** This was said just a few hours before He was put on the cross.

Brothers and sisters, this is why it's so important to listen to the One who knows us best. If we close our ears to his warnings, like Peter we'll try to fight and win on our own and we'll end up failing and falling but also miss the promise. But when the Spirit opens our ears to the truth of Jesus' warning, we'll also hear that the only solution, the only victory lies in Him.

Yes, the Good Shepherd would be struck. He would die, but He wouldn't stay dead. He would come roaring back to life to be reunited with His followers. That's what you and I have to look forward to. Jesus has risen and gone ahead of us, and now we can look forward to a reunion with Him.

When we die and stand before God in all His holiness and glory, we won't have to introduce ourselves. Instead, Jesus will know us and introduce us, not as some fools who failed to heed His warnings, but as His brothers and sisters, washed clean by His shed blood and sealed by His resurrection. Because of Jesus, we will be those the Father cannot deny. Because of Jesus, He will not deny or disown us, but call us His own, His own dear children. Because of Jesus, the Father already does.

When we listen to Jesus' words concerning us, then we have the greatest gift. We will then truly know ourselves and know Him as our Lord and Savior.

Thank the Lord!

Amen.