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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
Lent Series 2012: *Stunning Sins and Vast Forgivenesses*  
4/4/2012, Wednesday of Holy Week  
Peter Denies Our Lord, Luke 22:54-62

PRAYER OF THE DAY (Holy Wednesday)

P Almighty God, your Son our Savior suffered at human hands and endured the shame of the cross. Grant that we may walk in the way of his cross and find it the way of life and peace; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen**

*Note from Pastor Fryer: The story of Peter's denial of our Lord is like the story of Joseph and his brothers in that we have the account both of the sin and of the reconciliation between the sinner and the one sinned against. In the case of Peter, the One sinned against is Jesus.*

*We begin with Peter's sin:*

HOLY SCRIPTURE .....Luke 22:54-62, KJV

<sup>54</sup>Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. <sup>55</sup>And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. <sup>56</sup>But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. <sup>57</sup>And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. <sup>58</sup>And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. <sup>59</sup>And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaeen. <sup>60</sup>And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. <sup>61</sup>And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crew, thou shalt deny me thrice. <sup>62</sup>And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

*And now we hear of the reconciliation between Jesus and Peter:*

HOLY SCRIPTURE .....John 21:1-22, KJV

<sup>1</sup>After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. <sup>2</sup>There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. <sup>3</sup>Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup>But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. <sup>6</sup>And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. <sup>7</sup>Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. <sup>8</sup>And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. <sup>9</sup>As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. <sup>10</sup>Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. <sup>11</sup>Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. <sup>12</sup>Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup>Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. <sup>14</sup>This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. <sup>15</sup>So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. <sup>16</sup>He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. <sup>17</sup>He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup>Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. <sup>19</sup>This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. <sup>20</sup>Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? <sup>21</sup>Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? <sup>22</sup>Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **BOTH REBUKER AND DENIER**

It is a thing to be marveled at that the foremost of the twelve disciples was both a rebuker of our Lord and a denier of him. Peter rose to great heights of faith, as when he gave his confession concerning Jesus, that he was the Christ. But also he fell to great depths of disloyalty, as in this evening's story of his denial of our Lord.

For his great confession, Peter won the praise of Jesus, singling Peter out:

<sup>18</sup>And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.  
<sup>19</sup>And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.  
(Matthew 16:18-19, KJV)

For his rebuke of our Lord, Peter won a stern rebuke in return:

<sup>22</sup>Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. <sup>23</sup>But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. (Matthew 16:22-23, KJV)

And for his denial of our Lord, Peter won a look -- a look that melted and broke his heart.

It has often been said that Peter was an "impetuous" man. He springs forward, without a lot of deliberation beforehand. So, in his enthusiasm he does all willy-nilly: he proclaims Jesus to be the long-awaited Messiah, he rebukes Jesus for speaking of the cross, and he declares that he will never forsake the Lord:

<sup>33</sup>Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. <sup>34</sup>Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. <sup>35</sup>Peter said unto him, Though I should die with

thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.  
(Matthew 26:33-35, KJV)

I think that Peter was indeed an impetuous fellow, and I rather like him for it. He was not lukewarm. Why, even Jesus himself seems to dislike lukewarm people, judging by his condemnation of the church in Laodicea:

<sup>14</sup>And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; <sup>15</sup>I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. <sup>16</sup>So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. (Revelation 3:14-16, KJV)

Lukewarm was one thing Peter was not! Furthermore, his denial of Jesus was base and wrong whether or not Peter had sworn that he would never deny Jesus. The problem was not that Peter was impetuous and too easily swore his love to Jesus. The problem was that he did not live up to what he had sworn. The problem was not Peter's spontaneity, but his falseness. He had pledged a good thing when he promised to be true to Jesus. He might have pledged it without much thought, he might have pledged it recklessly, but however that might be, he pledged a good thing and it would have been better if he had lived up to it.

Likewise with any pledges you and I should make. Some of my seminary classmates, for example, sought ordination to the holy office of Word and Sacrament. When they were ordained, they made solemn promises to be servants of God's Word. They made the promises when they were young, and for some of them, the intervening years have been hard. Who could have blamed them if from time to time they had thought to themselves, "I wish I had become a medical doctor instead of a pastor. I wish I had become an attorney instead of a pastor. I wish I had become a blacksmith or an artist or a farmer instead of a pastor!" But in taking on those solemn promises of ordained ministry, they committed themselves to a good path in life, and God bless them for being true to that path.

It is the same thing with our baptism promises or marriage promises. We might have been young and foolish back then, but those promises carry a lot of weight and we should try to live up to them.

So, Peter pledged well. He just didn't follow through well.

## MONASTIC VIRTUES

In terms of what are called the “monastic virtues,” Peter fell short on the virtue of stability. One of Martin Luther’s chief contributions to Christian spirituality was his opening of the monastic virtues to all Christians, not just to monks and nuns. He taught that the monastic virtue of voluntary poverty, for example, is an appropriate virtue for parents, who voluntarily make themselves poor for the sake of their children. Money they could lavish on themselves they instead devote to the overall welfare of the family.

Likewise with the virtue of stability. Stability asks that we not yield to the restless roving of the spirit. If we give our word, for example, then we keep our word, even if other interesting possibilities should come along. We are stable.

Peter, then, gave his word to Jesus, pledging that he would not abandon his Lord. It would have been good if Peter had been stable in this. It would have been good if Peter had stayed close to Jesus as he pledged to do.

## IMAGINE PETER’S SORROW

Imagine Peter’s sorrow when the rooster greeted the morning sun with his crow. Imagine Peter’s sorrow when Jesus turned and look at him after Peter had denied his Lord.

This Good Friday, following our Good Friday liturgy at 7 p.m., Gwen will lead a sacred concert, starting at 8:30 p.m. The piece is called “The Tears of St. Peter” by a late renaissance composer named Orlande de Lassus (1532 – 1594). The text of this piece has many moving passages. Here is one imagining what Peter could have been thinking when Jesus turned and look at him:

*No one should boast being able to tell  
how the already stricken Peter felt  
as he met the gaze of those holy eyes,  
for no tongue could even approximate the truth;  
it looked as if his Lord, surrounded by many  
enemies and abandoned by his peers, wanted to say:  
“What I foretold him has now come to pass,  
disloyal friend, proud disciple.”*

This is what we do not want Jesus to say of us: “disloyal friend.” Let us try very hard that our Lord not have to refer to us that way.

## RECONCILIATION

In this evening’s Gospel reading from John 21, we heard of the reconciliation of Jesus and Peter. One day, you and I are going to have a similar

pastoral conversation with Jesus, I am quite sure of it. The one between Jesus and Peter does not sound fun. Three times Jesus asks Peter whether he loves him -- three times, as if unwinding the three denials, and getting Peter back on track. Each time Jesus asks the question, Peter's heart seems to sink lower and lower. But at last, Jesus finishes his questions and bids Peter to follow him. Set aside all other considerations and simply follow Jesus: "What is that to thee, Peter? Follow thou me."

## **LATER PETER WILL BE BRAVE**

And Peter does follow Jesus henceforth. Sometimes he follows well, sometimes poorly (at least in the judgment of his fellow apostle St. Paul -- see Galatians 2:11ff), but never again does Peter deny Jesus. In this evening's story, Peter's courage fails him. But later, after his reconciliation with Jesus, Peter will be brave. For example, one day Peter and John healed a man crippled from birth. The man then leaped with joy and praised the Lord:

<sup>6</sup>Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. <sup>7</sup>And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. <sup>8</sup>And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. <sup>9</sup>And all the people saw him walking and praising God: <sup>10</sup>And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. (Acts 3:6-10, KJV)

This miracle led to the arrest of Peter and John. They were put into the hold and brought before the magistrates the following day. What had happened to Jesus could not have been too far from their memories, but this time, Peter did not wilt. He gave strong testimony to Jesus and his resurrection:

<sup>13</sup>Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. <sup>14</sup>And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. (Acts 4:5-14, KJV)

## **WE REBUKERS AND DENIERS**

We rebukers and deniers of Jesus, then: If we have too often rebuked Jesus... if we have heard him say “Do thus and thus,” but we have rebuked him, saying “No such thing! I shall go my own way,” then there is hope for us nonetheless.

And if in the moment of crisis, we proved to be a denier of our Lord, for us too there is hope. We stand in apostolic company, for Peter long before us, denied our Lord Jesus. Peter has walked our path before us, even the low parts of that path. But he became reconciled and restored to Jesus and then a better man. Let us follow this good part of Peter’s path too, becoming more loyal friends to our Lord Jesus, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.