

Sermon 2011 Midweek 5

Text: Luke 22:60–62

Theme: Crowing Rooster

There are times when we fail God and other people. That is a fact. The question is what do you do with it? Do you try to justify your failure and push the blame elsewhere, do you fall into despair and give up all hope or do you confess your sin and unburden yourself? Judas, overwhelmed by what he did to his friend, chose to take his own life instead of facing the consequences of his failure. Peter, having committed the same sin, confessed, received forgiveness and new life and went on to make an impact on the Church that is almost unrivaled.

Listen to the rooster crow. (sound) A mournful sound rolling out of the dark night of our Lord's betrayal. It is sound that reminds us how quickly and how easily we too can betray our Lord with our sinful choices.

Peter is loud and brash. He speaks his mind. He often leaps before he looks. He's capable of tremendous insight and yet two seconds later can put both feet in his mouth. One moment he proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; the next he tries to keep Jesus from going to the cross. One moment he says he doesn't want Jesus to wash his feet; the next moment he wants a complete bath. That's Peter—wonderful heights of insight and intellect or falling flat on his face in front of everyone.

Nowhere are Peter's contradictions more obvious than during Jesus' passion. The night begins during the Last Supper. The disciples knew that something special was happening that night, but they didn't understand exactly what. Jesus talked about sorrow, worry, betrayal, and death. Then they sang the final psalm of the Passover and walked to the Mount of Olives.

As they were going out of the city, Jesus told the disciples, "This very night, you will all fall away" (Mt 26:31). They would all leave him, each hiding in his own way. That was too much for Peter. He didn't understand why Jesus was so upset; he didn't know why there was all this talk about betrayal and death; but he did know one thing: He loved his Lord, and he was never, ever going to fall away from him. "No, Lord!" he bellowed. "Everyone else may fall away, but I will never fall away. Even if I have to die with you, I'll never leave you!" There it is—classic Peter, bold, brash, loud, and confident. The others might let Jesus down, but he never would.

You can imagine sadness in Jesus' eyes. He loved Peter. He also knew Peter. "Peter, tonight, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you know me."

I'm sure Peter was stung. How could Jesus even that? Didn't Jesus know his love, his loyalty? They continued up the hill, going into the garden. Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him and asked them to pray with him.

He jerked awake. Jesus was next to him. "Peter, can't you even pray with me for one hour?" Peter was filled with shame. Jesus left again. Peter probably started to pray. But somehow, no matter how he began, the prayer trailed off. Asleep again. And again.

"Peter, wake up! Here comes my betrayer now!" Rubbing his eyes, Peter tried to understand what was going on. His mind was foggy from sleep. Then he heard what Jesus was talking about—the sound of an angry mob coming up the hill. It was a small army of men with swords, spears, and clubs. And leading the crowd was Judas Iscariot—one of Jesus' own disciples.

Peter grew angry—Judas in front of the mob, the swords of the temple guard, the spears of the Roman army. It all built up inside him. He drew his sword. Jesus might want to go along calmly, but he wasn't going without a fight. Peter lunged forward, swinging at first person he encountered. He managed to cut off an ear, which at least drew some blood.

“Peter!” called Jesus. “Put that thing away! Don’t you know I could call out to my Father and he would send more than 12 legions of angels? But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” Then Jesus touched the man’s ear and healed it.

Peter took a step back and thought about what he’d done. What had he been thinking, pulling a sword against a contingent of soldiers? Did he have a death wish? Was he crazy? He didn’t know; he just ran. He was scared to death and ran away.

Jesus was being taken to the house of Annas, the high priest’s father-in-law, and then to the palace of Caiaphas himself. Peter watched from the court yard. No sooner did he walk into the courtyard, than he was recognized. “You, you were with him too!” said the girl who opened the courtyard gate. What could Peter do? He’d been spotted. “No, that wasn’t me,” he said. “I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

It was cold and someone had built a fire. Pulling his cloak over him, he walked over to the fire to warm himself. Immediately the accusations started again. Another servant girl looked closely at him: “You were with that man, Jesus of Nazareth.”

“I don’t know him,” Peter declared. “I’ve never met the man.” He walked away. But the inquisitors weren’t satisfied. “He is one of them! I know he is!” someone insisted. “Yeah, he’s one of them! Can’t you hear that accent? He’s from Galilee!” Peter was scared to death. What could he say? Summoning up all the courage he had left inside, he began to scream. “What’s wrong with you people? I said I don’t know the man, and I don’t! As surely as the Lord lives, I DO NOT KNOW THE MAN!” And the rooster crowed. (sound)

The sound reverberated through the early morning light. And there was Jesus, looking right at Peter. Peter ran out and began to weep.

How often we’re just like Peter! We think we have it all figured out. No way will we be disloyal to Jesus! Others might fail him, but we never will. Even if everyone else falls away, we will never fall away!

But the truth is we do deny Jesus. Every time we sin. Every time we place ourselves and our wants before his. Every time we hurt one another. Every time we choose to believe the wisdom of the world instead of him, we deny Jesus.

And then the rooster crows. Somehow we are made aware of our sin. And what do we do? We hear that horrible mournful cry as a call to arms. It wakes us from our sinful sleep and reminds us that as Jesus stares at us across the courtyard of our sin, it is not with malice for he did not come to condemn us but to save us. His eyes are full of love and forgiveness. He is the waiting father and we are the prodigal sons. He reaches out to us as he reached out to Peter and to Judas with love and compassion. Forgiveness flows to us through his very body and blood – through his Word to us – through the water of Baptism that washes us clean of the dirtiest choices. But in the end it is your choice. Do you embrace his forgiveness that he has freely given you? Do you want to be restored like Peter? Or do you choose to wallow in your failure and despair like Judas?