



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

March 14, 2012
Midweek Lenten Worship
Pastor Randy Ott

Sermon Text: [Matthew 26:69-75](#)

Sacred Heart, Now Wounded: The Wound of Denial

“Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you.” That’s what Peter had said hours earlier, before what we just read happened. In fact, when Jesus had said one of them would betray him, Peter looked around the table and said “These guys might. I never will.” Peter was pretty confident of his love for Jesus. Peter thought there was nothing in the world that could ever drive a wedge between him, his love for his Savior, and that Savior. In fact, even when the mob first came, he is the guy that took the sword and cut off that ear. He was willing to defend Jesus at that point, to the death. But like Jesus had told them, Scripture said, “I’ll strike the shepherd and the sheep will scatter.” And they all scattered. With the fear that must have been coursing along through his veins, along with the adrenaline as they were running away, that love for his Savior began to fade in the background and fear really had to be what took over his heart, isn’t it?

([Matthew 26.](#))

Jesus knew that. Jesus knows what is in the heart of mankind. He knows what we are like. That’s why earlier in the day he looked Peter square in the eye and (it sounded like a LeBron James press conference) he said, “Not once, not twice, but three times you are going to deny me.” Then he said “Here’s a little reminder. Here’s a little audible cue for you of these words I’m speaking to you. You’ll hear a rooster crow and then remember everything I’ve told you.”

If you think about all these wounds that afflicted our Savior during his Passion that we’ve been looking at, they are all terrible sins and they killed our Savior. There’s no denying that. But humanly speaking you wonder, don’t you, if this wound of denial by Peter kind of dug a little deeper? Peter was in the advanced placement class of disciples. He was the one that Jesus had singled out, along with James and John, to be with him. When he raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead, he saw his power over death. He was there and saw his full divine glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Earlier that evening, those three had been with Jesus when Jesus had begged them, “Just stay here and keep spiritual watch with me and pray with me for an hour, could you?” So humanly speaking, you wonder if that had a little more of a dig to it because Jesus had invested so much time in Peter. He had warned them, and the words just went in one ear and out the other.

That’s how it is when fear overtakes us. When we are so focused on what we see and not what our Savior says, we screw things up. Often in life we live with blinders on, only seeing what we see and forgetting what our Savior has said and forgetting about our greater and grander purposes in life. We can get so narrowly focused.

At this point in time, Peter was just a lot like us. We get kind of narrowly focused on fear at times too, don't we? It leads you and me to deny our Savior. The fear of the death of a friendship, because who wants to be friends with a religious zealot that is always talking about their faith, so we keep quiet when we could speak up. The fear of loss of a reputation; who wants to be with some religious nut job that believes in some invisible guy in the sky that created everything, so we keep silent.

Fear seizes us and causes you and me to deny Jesus just as certainly as Peter did. In fact, our silence is a slow and steady walk right up to the ear of our Savior and then we scream into his ear, "I do not know the man!" That's what we do. But look at how our Savior does not use the wound of denial as a reason to deny us. Where we are faithless, he is faithful.

He continues on the path that takes him to the cross to die for our sins. He continues to live perfectly in our place where we have failed, where we were silent and denied our God. We heard Jesus make the good confession before the high priest. He knew what would happen when he said "I am" to the answer "Are you the Christ? The Son of the Blessed One?" But he made the good confession. And he told them what would happen. He didn't deny his Father. He didn't deny his mission. He didn't deny his purpose. He carried it out perfectly because he had to obey perfectly in our place because you and I don't. So he continues on, even though he hates death. He scorns death.

God hates death. God did not create a world that had death. Death is always a reminder of sin. It's always a reminder of how his people have failed him. He hates death. Yet he continues on, not crippled by the fear of death that Peter had or the fear of these other things that you and I have. He knew what he was going to go through, but he knew he had to do it so that you and I might be forgiven. So he did it. That's how complete and absolute and perfect his love is for us in the face of our repeated failings. He loves us that perfectly. He does all the things that need to be done.

At this point in time, what I read to you about Peter, his fear seized him up because he had heard Jesus talk about his death and resurrection, but he couldn't take his eyes off his own fear. That would change though. There would come a day when he would stand in front of a crowd of thousands and say "You killed the Son of God. You killed the Promised Messiah." Those are harsh words. You might think the mob might get upset with him. Some of the same people that carried torches and spears that Thursday night might come on that Sunday and get him, but he doesn't back down anymore. The fear of death is gone. The Lord uses those powerful words on Pentecost to bring thousands to know their Savior.

What has changed? What is different about Peter? Now he knows the power of the resurrection because the power of the Spirit lives in him. That's the only thing that changes Peter from a man of fear to a man of courage. The knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus Christ who has defeated death; death took him. Death swallowed him whole, but then death had to spit him back out because death couldn't contain

Christ because he came to defeat the power of the devil who holds the power of death. Once Satan was defeated, death had lost its hold on him. And death has lost its hold on us. We don't have to fear eternal death. When Peter knows that, he speaks boldly.

He went out and he wept those bitter tears. He turned to his Savior in repentance. He heard Jesus ask him three times, "Do you love me?" And he heard Jesus' absolution saying, "Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs." He knew that he now lived in the power of the resurrection and the Spirit poured out on him changed him.

The God that loved us enough to send Jesus loves you enough and I enough to do the same thing. The God that has done this has given us the same power in our Baptism, in the Word, and in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He pours out the Spirit on us to give us a power that is beyond our knowledge, beyond our understanding, beyond our motivation, beyond our ability to do anything. He gives us a new power that is unlike anything that resides in us by nature. And it moves us to want to speak about our Lord and to desire to serve him and not deny him. It gives us the power, where we have failed, to step back up to the plate and swing with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Don't wallow in the guilt of your denial. Acknowledge it. Throw it on the cross of Christ, and turn away from it, but live in the power of the Spirit. God will enable you and I to do amazingly courageous things.