

“AND THE ROOSTER CROWED.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

February 16, 2014, 10:30AM

Scripture Text: Mark 14:66-72

Introduction.

I know Him not.

But Peter, He chose you to be one of His own disciples. I know Him not.

But Peter, you were there when He healed your wife's mother. I know Him not.

But Peter, you were the one who said, “Lord, if it is you let me walk on the water” and you did, and when you almost drowned He saved you. I know Him not.

But Peter, you were the one who said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” and He said to you, “You are the rock on which I will build my Church.” I know Him not.

But Peter, you were with Him on the mountain and saw His glory and said, “Lord, let us build shelters and stay here.” I know Him not.

But Peter, you went out in His name and with His authority and healed and cast out demons and did miracles in His name.

I do not know this man of whom you speak.

But Peter, you heard Him say, “whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven; but whoever disowns me, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”

I tell you. I do not know the man!

But Peter, you were just in the Upper Room with Him, He washed your feet, you drank the cup.

You lie! I swear to you, I don't know Him.

But Peter, you were just in the garden with Him. You drew a sword to defend Him and cut off the high priest's servant's ear.

May I be damned to perish in hell if I ever had anything to do with this man. I deny ever knowing Him.

And the rooster crowed a second time.

And the Word of the Lord that is sharper than a double-edged sword pierced his soul and cut him to the heart and he broke down and wept bitterly.

A shipwreck is a sad sight to behold. The panic and fear that engulfed so many in the hours before and after, the destruction, the suffering and loss of life. The struggle to escape drowning and the terrible death it brings. The nightmares for years to come. A shipwreck is a fearful thing.

But no shipwreck is as terrible as the shipwreck of one's faith. We have before us the story of the shipwreck Peter made of his faith by his denial of Jesus. And though he was raised again by God's grace and mercy, and saved from hell, the memory of this night was always a painful one.

Mark 14:66-72.

Around the story of Jesus' confession before the high priest is this story of Peter's denial in the high priest's courtyard. Mark tells the two stories to draw out the contrasts between Jesus' faithfulness and Peter's unfaithfulness.

This is a contrast between two great trials. While Jesus was undergoing His trial before the high priest, Peter was undergoing a trial of his own in the high priest's courtyard.

Jesus struggled in prayer and stood firm in trial, Peter slept during prayer and struggled in trial. Jesus had prayed three times and stood firm once. Peter didn't pray and denied three times. Jesus was accused by false witnesses whose stories didn't agree. Peter was accused by true witnesses whose stories agreed. The charge against Jesus was that He blasphemed, which was false. The charge against Peter was that he knew Jesus, which was true, and he blasphemed with oaths and curses. Jesus was falsely convicted. Peter was falsely acquitted. (credit to Doug Wilson's sermon on Mark 14 for these contrasts.)

Peter's trial in the high priest's courtyard started with a young servant girl of the high priest and her small question. It was just a simple comment in a conversation around a fire. Was it a threat? If so it wasn't from an armed mob, just a servant girl.

Peter wasn't broken by some superior force, by a man twice his size. He wasn't standing before the high priest or some Roman centurion. The voice of a small

servant girl stroke terror in his heart and his courage vanished. It isn't usually some great overwhelming force or power that defeats us.

First she accused him alone and then again with other bystanders. Finally, the bystanders said his Galilean accent gave him away. The third time Peter cursed and uttered an oath that he didn't know the man they were talking about.

And the Rooster Crowed a Second time.

When Peter heard the rooster crow a second time the words of Jesus rang in his head. "Before the rooster crows twice you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

He thought he was so strong, he boasted of what he would never do, others maybe, but not him. His fall was hard, so many repetitions, so vehement, against so great a friend.

Luke says Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Application and conclusion.

Indeed, shipwrecks are the source of great sadness, whether on the sea or in the soul. But the shipwreck of the "Simon Peter" has become now a lighthouse whose beacon warns others off the rocks of temptation and sin.

These things are written that we might learn from them and benefit from them. Countless Christians through all these centuries have benefited from the warnings of Peter's fall. In fact, I would dare to say this one man's failure has borne more fruit than a thousand men's successes.

I Corinthians 10:11-13 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

The anatomy of a shipwreck, of a great fall. (see J.C. Ryle, *Luke 2*, p. 436). Peter put himself in harm's way in several ways.

First, Peter was self-confident, even boasting that this would never happen to him, maybe everyone else, but never him. Never say you would never sin in the way

others have. Always say “but for the grace of God I would do exactly that same thing.” Never be presumptuous. Never look down on others and their sin.

His presumption may also be what led him into that courtyard. If he had taken Jesus’ warning to heart he would have stayed away from any opportunity to sin in the way Jesus said he would.

Second, Peter neglected prayer and the power of God. Jesus urged him to watch and pray lest he fall into temptation, but he slept instead.

“O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear when we don’t take our trials and temptations to the Lord in prayer.”

Even after conversion and receiving the Holy Spirit and knowing the Word of God, we are capable of great sin. We are all painfully fallible and able to fall to great depths.

I Corinthians 10:12 Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Watch and pray. Humble yourselves before God, plead in prayer daily, “Lord, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

“Jesus, please keep me from making a shipwreck of my faith. Please keep me from ruining my testimony. Keep me from denying the power of the Gospel by my own impotence in the face of temptation. Jesus, give me your strength from heaven and your courage to walk and not fall.”

Remember not just Peter but Noah, Abraham, Lot, Samson, David, Hezekiah. Oh, how the mighty are fallen, even the greatest. None of us is beyond falling.

We must all be humble. In the best of times we are all weak and foolish. In my heart and yours is a boundless capacity for sin and folly and ruin. We must watch our hearts diligently in even the smallest matters. Fear sin and flee far from it. Fear God and flee to Him.

Third, Peter was timid and indecisive. First he fought for Jesus, then he fled like the rest and later thought he could follow Jesus from a great distance.

It’s folly to following Jesus at a distance, to keep Him at arm’s length, to relate to him only on our terms and not on His; to want only a casual acquaintance. You cannot expect anything good to come from keeping Jesus as a safe distance.

Fourth, Peter mingled with bad company and in doing so tried to conceal his own faith and religion. He thought he would be safe in a bad crowd. We seldom are. This crowd led him astray and by their words and actions pushed Peter to say and do things he never dreamed possible, things he had vehemently said he would never do even if he had to die.

Peter's association with this crowd brought trails of faith into his life that he was completely unprepared to deal with. This crowd paved the way for his greatest sin, to deny His Lord not once but three times.

Fifth, Peter's fear and timidity gave way to cowardice and then denial.

Peter was naïve about how when we stumble into sin we seldom stumble only once. A small indiscretion, a tiny inconsistency, a white lie, a simple click of the mouse and before you know it we make a shipwreck of our faith.

Did you hear a couple of days ago about those two students at Reed College in Portland having a little fun out in a rare snowstorm? They started making a snowball and it got bigger and bigger and bigger until it was huge, maybe 800 pounds. It got away from them on a hill and crashed into a dorm caving in a wall, doing thousands of dollars of damage. Just a little snowball that got out of control.

They had no intention of doing any damage, but that's often the case. Nothing was intended by such a small thing, who knew. But looking back there was a starting point, a small beginning.

The Captain of the Costa Concordia just wanted to sail off course a little bit to get closer to that island and before you know it the boat is shipwrecked and thirty two people die.

A casual bit of flirting ends in a terrible immorality. A little taste turns into a raging addiction. A little failing to report turns to tax fraud or embezzlement. A little gossip and slander turns into a critical spirit and bitterness. A little lie becomes a lifestyle.

What started out for King David as an afternoon of idleness turned into adultery and then murder. What started out for Ananias and Sapphira as a little lie ended in their death.

For Peter it began with over-confidence and neglect, then some timidity, some cowardice, and ended with an oath filled denial of Jesus Christ.

No temptation is too small or inconsequential. In fact, haven't we all experienced how the smallest temptations deceive us the most and are the ones we fall into the quickest?

There is nothing little about a temptation that endangers our soul or our faith or our relationship with God.

Never say of any sin, it's just a very small one. A little leaven leavens the whole loaf. A small spark ignites an entire forest. A small leak sinks a huge ship. The slightest provocation can start a war.

A seed sown today may spring up later and bear bitter fruit. Beware of the small beginnings of backsliding. Keep yourself far back from the brink of all evil.

Finally, every shipwreck has a rescue operation. While there's a bitter harvest in temptation and sin, there is forgiveness and grace for those who repent in tears.

Sin is a bitter heartache but we must never despair, however far we have fallen the compassion and forgiveness of Christ is sufficient if we repent and turn from our sin and turn to Jesus.

Jesus' heart was gracious and reached out to Peter. He prayed for him, He had compassion on him, He restored him and He used him mightily in ministry in His church. And Peter sits in glory with all the redeemed and forgiven saints.

That rooster had a name. I know that no one names roosters, but this one had a name. His name was grace. If that rooster had never crowed Peter might have remained in his sin and hardness of heart and guilty conscience and remorse and never turned back from his betrayal and denial.

But the rooster crowed and Peter went out and wept bitterly and hated his sin and repented and turned from it and was restored. Whatever God uses to bring us to repentance and to restore us is grace, whether it's pain, another person, a verse, or our own conscience.

If there was hope for Peter, there is hope for us. God doesn't wash His hands of us because of our weakness or foolishness. As long as there is no hatred or malice or hardness in our hearts, as long as there is some glimmer of desire to truly repent, He is compassionate.

If we fall as Peter fell, we must repent as Peter repented.
If we repent like Peter we shall be restored like Peter.

Two of Jesus' disciples betrayed Him that night. One went and tried to undo what he did on his own but failed and ended up killing himself. The other wept tears of repentance and found forgiveness and restoration.

Remorse only makes a man more miserable, filling him with shame, guilt and regrets.

Repentance does so much more. It makes a man's heart soft, it makes his conscience tender, it turns his heart toward the Father and leads to reconciliation and relief, to restored joy and peace.

When you give into temptation and sin, brothers and sisters, take this to heart and trust in God's mercy and grace. Don't remain in remorse and regret, but turn quickly to repentance.

Remember who Jesus died for? The righteous, the worthy? No, for deserters and cowards.

Peter's fall is like a lighthouse with a strong beacon warning of the danger that awaits souls on the rocks of temptation and sin. No doubt the inclusion of this account of the tragic fall of Peter has saved countless souls from destruction or shipwreck.

Watch and pray. And pray for your brothers and sisters, pray for this church family, pray for your spiritual leaders, for your pastors, staff, elders, deacons, volunteer teachers and leaders.

And when you have fallen and been raised up, help your brothers and sisters who fall, lift them up, strengthen their hands, encourage their faith, bear one another's burdens.

Prayer:

Holy Father, grant to each of us in the night of our denials and betrayals, in the night of our self-condemnation and sorrow, in the night of all our sins, the same hope in Jesus' forgiveness and the same assurance of His intercession. When our hearts break yet again from the weight of our repeated sins, bring us to sincere repentance by whatever holy means will be most effective. Plant deeply in our hearts the lessons Peter learned that we might bear the kind of fruit Peter bore for your glory.