

Sermon Luke 22 54 62 4th S in Lent Series C

Sermon: 4th Sunday in Lent

Text: Luke 22:54-62 (vv.60-62)

Theme: The LORD looks after the sinner

Goal: To assure Jesus' gracious eyes upon us when we are weak; let's always return to Him.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Have you had the experience to be questioned about your Christian faith? Maybe by a friend? Maybe by a family member? Maybe in a stressful situation? What was your reaction: Were you embarrassed? Shy? Quiet? Or did you confess what you believe?

In times of peace it's easier to confess our faith; but even then we sometimes remain quiet. In times of war and persecution, when even our life is threatened, it is not so easy, like Christians are facing threats under the fanatic ISIS terrorist group.

The story of Peter disowning Jesus has something to warn us, but also to comfort us.

I – Peter followed Jesus at a distance

The problem of Peter began when he followed Jesus "at a distance". Maybe some will interpret it as an act of courage, that he followed Jesus into the *lion's den*, into the house of the enemy, the High Priest. Peter had said to Jesus: "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same" (Matthew 25:35). This means: he should have clung to Jesus and stay with Him even in the trial and on the cross. But now we see him following Jesus "at a distance", hidden by the shadows of the night, just to see what would happen.

When we follow Jesus "at a distance", and are not close to Him, we are vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy. We have to follow Him

on His footprints, step by step, on good days and on bad days, holding firm to His Word and to the Sacraments to be strengthened in our weaknesses.

II – Peter sat down with the enemies

The second problem of Peter was that he sat down with the enemies around the fire to warm himself. He mixed himself with Jesus' scoffers. Psalm 1:1 says: "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers."

It was Peter's choice to sit down with them. We sometimes don't have the choice, but we have to sit with our workmates or classmates who are not Christians and they make jokes that don't fit with a Christian behaviour. It's an embarrassing situation for a Christian to stand firm in his/her faith in such a situation. But don't take the risk to sit with enemies around a table or around a fire. We are weak and can fall. A proverb says: *Tell me with whom you walk, and I will tell you who you are.*

III – Peter was afraid about his life

When Peter was confronted for the first time, not by a soldier or by one of the priests, but by a simple servant girl, he feared for his life and answered fast: "Woman, I don't know Him." This happened for a second time, and he denied again. There was no excuse when he was accused for the third time, because his Galilean accent was recognized by someone else. And, fearing for his life, he replied: "Man, I don't know what you are talking about."

This is Peter, considered the strongest and the leader of the Apostles. When he was confronted, he disowned Jesus. To preserve his life and his integrity was more important for him at that stage than to witness about Jesus. His sin can be compared with the sin of

Judas, who betrayed Jesus. What is the difference between these two disciples?

IV – Jesus’ eyes are upon His weak followers

When Judas came to betray Jesus and to kiss Him, Jesus looked at him with love and said: “Do what you came for, friend?” (Matthew 26:50).

Jesus called Judas as “friend” in a last attempt to call him to repentance. But Jesus’ words didn’t touch the heart of Judas. The Gospel reports: “When Judas... saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse... “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood... Then he went away and hanged himself”

(Matthew 27: 3-5). Judas acknowledged that he had done wrong when betraying Jesus. He was seized with remorse, but he didn’t repent and didn’t believe that Jesus could forgive him. He solved his problem by himself... in the worse way possible.

Peter was called by Jesus to repentance by a simple blink. After the third denial, “just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.”

Peter was in the courtyard of the palace of the High Priest in a position that he could see Jesus inside, maybe at the terrace, being judged by the High Priest. And this gave Jesus the opportunity to look to Peter with love, calling him to repentance. And Peter understood the look of Jesus and going outside he “wept bitterly”.

But he didn’t get desperate like Judas. It must have been terrible days for Peter from Good Friday until Easter Sunday evening, when Jesus arose from the death and appeared to the disciples saying: “Peace be with you” (John 20:19). I cannot imagine how much he suffered

in his conscience for what he had done. And some days later the resurrected Jesus called Peter for a close conversation at the shore of Galilee Sea, and asked him three times: “Peter, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him three times, and he answered: “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you” (John 21:17). And Jesus reinstated Peter in the Holy Ministry. – The answer of Peter was a confession that Jesus knew the heart of Peter and He knows our heart too: We are weak, we fall, but we love Jesus. He forgives us and reinstates us daily in His family when we repent and believe in His forgiveness and love.

Conclusion: When Jesus died on the cross, He paid for the sins of everyone, one by one. He paid for the sin of Judas, for the sin of Peter, for my sins, for your sins. The sacrifice was accepted by God and the ransom was paid. Either we believe and are forgiven, like Peter; or we don't believe and get desperate like Judas. Be sure, Jesus' eyes are always ready to look to you in the darkest hours of your life, calling you back to Him.

But don't give a chance to the evil, like Peter did. Don't go to places where it's easy to fall and to deny your faith. Paul warns us: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). Take care of the gift of salvation you received from God when you were baptized and called into His family. Nurture your faith daily by reading the Bible at home and by praying. Strengthen your faith by eating and drinking Jesus' body and blood in the fellowship of the Altar. Be among His disciples as many times as possible and practice Christian love among your family, friends and needy people. Don't be passive in your behaviour as a Christian; but be active, shining your light in the darkness. And when you fall – and who never falls? – come back to Jesus. His gracious eyes will look upon you with favour and give you peace. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 06 March 2016