

Pastor Kenneth Mars

Immanuel Lutheran Church – Burns, WY

Lent II – Midweek (members of St. John’s Kimball, Grace Pine Bluffs, Zion Grover also present)

March 19, 2014

Text: Matthew 26:26–75; I Timothy 2:8–13

The Crucified King<sup>1</sup>

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The apostle Peter seems to have been one of those kinds of persons that does everything in the extreme. His triumphs are great; his defeats are monumental. A bold and inspired Peter confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” (Matthew 16:16). A brave and sincere Peter promised Jesus, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” (Matthew 26:35). A loyal and protective Peter tried to defend Jesus when they came to arrest the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus the servant of the high priest. It was Jesus who told Peter to sheath his sword (John 18:10). It was faithful Peter (Matthew 26) who went into the courtyard of the high priest to know what was happening with Jesus even though all the other disciples had ran away and hid.

It was there Peter met his match; two servant girls and some harmless bystanders proved to be his undoing. A most curious turn of events, to be sure.

According to tonight’s second reading from Matthew 26, Peter is sitting in the courtyard of the high priest. A servant girl looks at Peter and says, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” A lying Peter says, “I do not know what you mean.” But he had the sense to leave. Standing in the entrance, another servant girl said to the bystanders – but certainly within Peter’s earshot – “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” An oath-breaking Peter responds “I do not know the man.” The bystanders would not let the matter rest, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.” A cowardly Peter invoked curses upon himself and swore, “I do not know the man.” The rooster crowed! Matthew writes, “Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three time.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.”

Peter, a man of great triumphs and monumental defeats.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the sermon Series “The Crucified King” published by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 2014.

What we can say in Peter's defense is that his life was in danger. He could have been arrested and then who knows what might of happened. He's got a family. Remember Peter's mother-in-law; Jesus healed her from a dangerously high fever (Matthew 8:14–15).

So much attention upon Peter, what about us? Do we not also deny Jesus when the situation becomes a bit uncertain or tense? When there's the possibility that our reputations might be called into question because of our commitment to Jesus, or when people might think we aren't being very nice because of our refusal to compromise on biblical doctrine, or when there's a chance of alienation from family and friends because of commitments to Jesus and His Church. At confirmation, we all said that we would "suffer all, even death" rather than fall away from "this confession and Church." Do we remember those words?

Peter remembered his promises of faithfulness and fidelity. And he wept bitterly when he realized what he had done. Those were tears of repentance. Though all of the Christian life is to be one of repentance, Lent especially calls us to recognize our sins and turn away from them. But more importantly – and we must hear this loud and clear tonight – Lent calls us to hear and receive Christ's forgiveness and restoring love.

King Jesus did not deny His heavenly Father or the people He came to save. He remained faithful all the way through the Sanhedrin's mock trial, Pilate's interrogation, the soldiers' mockery and cruelty, and even through the divine punishment of Calvary's cross. These things Jesus did because He would not and could not deny you or any of His people. We heard the words of the Apostle Paul in tonight's first reading, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). Jesus could never deny His office as Savior. In faithfulness, He rose from the dead to impart to you the peace that passes all understanding, the peace that comes by the blood of His cross and the triumph of His undying Easter life.

Jesus saves us from the denials, large and small, we commit each and every day through our sins and failures. He forgives them even as He forgave Peter. The Lord restored Peter back to his apostolic office. Jesus cannot and will not deny us, not when there is repentance and faith. Jesus took your baptismal waters and clothed you with Himself, with His faithfulness, courage, loyalty and steadfast love. By His grace, He makes you new and gives you a new birth of holiness and eternal life.

A forgiven, restored, and bold apostle Peter would write decades later about Christians being born again of imperishable seed, that is, the living and abiding word of God (I Peter 1:23). He knew and experienced the grace of Jesus.

And so have you. You know what it's like to receive the transcendent, majestically beautiful grace and love of Jesus. That's why you're here on a Wednesday evening. Christ has been faithful to you in all things; that faithfulness calls you back to Jesus day after day. In His faithfulness you stand now and forever as His faithful people.

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.