

SERMON

Have you ever been caught by surprise in a store? Your son's car won't start, so you drive him to an early morning football practice. You haven't had time to shower or put on anything decent. On the way home, you stop by the store to grab a few things and then comes the voice. Someone calls out your name. Normally, you like meeting people . . . but not today. Today, you want to run and hide. Why? Because all of a sudden you see yourself and you think "Do I really look like this, out in a public place?" It's a moment of self-revelation.

Today, we move from the garden on the night of Jesus' betrayal and into the courtyard and there we have Peter having that infamous moment of self-revelation. Peter sees who he is in terms of his denial.

But, by God's grace, Jesus also holds out another picture for us. A picture of who Jesus is for Peter: his Savior. Today, we will meditate on these two pictures—Peter's denial and Peter's Savior. Doing that, it is my prayer that we will grow in trust of our Savior, who enters places of denial and turns them into places of renewal in His love.

Consider that courtyard. As we listen to the conversation that occurs in the courtyard, we see more and more of Peter's life stripped away. It's kind of like watching a crack in the foundation slowly spread, bringing the whole house to ruin.

The servant girl is the first to reveal the problem. She mentions the relationship between Peter and Jesus. **"This man also was with Him," she says (Luke 22:56).** She puts Peter and Jesus together with these words. But Peter denies it. **"I do not know Him,"** he says. A crack in the foundation. He denies his Lord. And when your relationship with Jesus is broken, it doesn't take long for everything else to give.

From there, we move to Peter's relationship with Jesus and the disciples. Someone says, **"You are also one of them" (22:58).** So, we have Peter and Jesus and then Peter and the disciples. Finally, someone offers the bigger picture. He says, **"Certainly, this fellow was with Him, for he too is a Galilean" (22:59).** We move from Peter and Jesus to Peter and the disciples to Peter and all of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee. And Peter still says **"No."** When your relationship with Jesus is broken, it doesn't take long for everything else to give.

At this moment, Peter has a moment of painful self-revelation. He hears a sound, sees a face, and remembers a word. Luke writes, **"Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord" (22:60–61).** **Have you ever caught that before? That Jesus was there and saw and heard.**

Here Peter, like hearing your name called in a store, remembers and sees too. He remembers what Jesus said. Jesus knew him better than he knew himself. Peter said he would follow Jesus to prison. He'd follow Him to death. But instead, he denied he ever knew Jesus. This is a moment of spiritual self-revelation. By our own might, we are unable to follow Jesus. Salvation is not dependent on what we do for Jesus. It never has been, and it never will be. And, if we ever rely on our own strength rather than Jesus, we've entered into a place of denial.

That is what really makes a place of denial. Not the drama of having other people question you about Jesus but the simple nature of your relationship to Him. Whenever we rely on our own strength instead of Jesus, we've entered into a place of denial.

Think about our places of denial. You believe in Jesus. You said in your confirmation vows that you would follow him unto death. You said, if you have moved and joined one of our Missouri Synod churches that you would be faithful in your support of that church and use your time and talents and treasures to support it and be diligent in prayer for that church and faithful in receiving the Lord's Supper at that church, but then maybe life happens.

You get busy with work. You get busy with your family. You get busy trying to make sure your children are successful or just get busy getting distracted by the world's many lures of leisure and fun and before long, you have denied that oath in your own way. You went back on your word. You said you would follow Jesus and be faithful to Him, but cracks start developing in your foundation. Cracks that Satan wants to exploit and blast clear open.

What has happened is you have begun relying too much on your power to solve your problems, to ensure you or your children's success, to make sure YOU are driving the car of your life, and in the meantime, without maybe realizing it, there is a crack between you and Jesus. And if that crack remains, the foundation you have built for yourself may fall.

Unfortunately, this uncertain time in which we live right now with the virus ravaging our land and forcing people out of work may be this time that shakes that foundation the most.

It is where this may be a time of self-revelation for you too where you reevaluate your relationship with Jesus. It is where really every day and time is to be a time of self-revelation in our life where we realize, we can't rely upon ourselves because stock markets can crash and we can't do a thing about it. Illnesses may come and we are helpless to stop them. It is in these times when the Lord would move us to see. We can't depend upon ourselves. We are weak. We are sinful. We can get sick, and cannot free ourselves from any of those things.

But it is to all of us that are brought to that place, Luke offers another word for us. The word of Jesus. The story of His Passion. In the midst of our failure, Jesus is and remains the one who takes away our sin. Our salvation does not depend on how much we can bear for Jesus. Instead, it depends on what Jesus bears for us. Our forgiveness does not depend on what we do or say for Jesus. It rests securely on what Jesus does and says for us.

In the face of Peter's denial as His disciple, Jesus continues to be his Lord. While Peter goes out to weep bitterly, Jesus goes on to suffer for this man that is weeping. It is His work, His love, His mercy that overcomes our sin. Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself. And Jesus knows you better than you know yourself.

He sees this denial and our sin, and yet He continues to go to the cross. We are not saved by giving our lives up for Jesus; Jesus saves us by giving up His life for the forgiveness of our sin. That's what Luke reveals to us this day. When Peter is caught in the act of denial, Jesus continues in His act of love.

By doing this, Luke asks us to see a different picture. The picture of a Savior's love. Jesus comes to us in the most awkward of moments. He does not wait until we get it all together to

visit our homes. He does not wait until we have overcome our temptations and fought our demons and conquered our sins and achieved our goals.

No. He comes now, while we struggle. Now, while we confess our failure. He comes now to assure us that **“by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8–9).** Jesus is the foundation of our life before God. God the Father received His life for your life that He might give you His love for all time.

Jesus comes to you today with a love that never changes. Time passes and our life is filled with change. We move from a dorm to an apartment, from an apartment to a house, from a house to a retirement center, from a retirement center to a skilled care facility, from the skilled care facility to our grave, and from our grave we will be raised to live in our Savior’s kingdom.

In each place, however, Jesus remains the same. He is the one who forgives our sins and saves our souls. Even at the end, after death and the grave, we will be raised to find Him as we have always known Him to be. The one who went to the cross to die for our sin and rose from the grave for our salvation. Jesus brings us today a picture of His love.

In those times when you are faced with a painful self-revelation, Luke wants you to see your Savior. Trust in His love, live in His kingdom, pray in His name. Jesus enters our places of denial and makes them places of renewal in His love. Amen.