

Lent – A Time of Renewal of Witness  
Mark 14:66-72  
March 22, 2017

*While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. “You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,” she said. But he denied it. “I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,” he said, and went out into the entryway. When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, “This fellow is one of them.” Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.” He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about.” Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept.*

Good ol’ Peter. What an easy target he is. Did you know, it’s said that Peter never wore sandals? He didn’t like the taste of shoe leather. Peter had a severe case of foot-in-mouth disease. I guess Peter never heard the old saying – *Caution: engage brain before starting mouth*. Peter was one of those impetuous people who always seem to do or say the wrong thing, not because they’re bad people, but because they just don’t first stop and think.

Tonight we’re going to look at Lent as a time of renewal of our witness for Jesus Christ. To that end, our text holds up Peter as a negative example. Sometimes it’s easier to learn from the negative than the positive. As I like to tell people, you don’t learn to ride a bicycle by riding it. You learn to ride a bicycle by falling off.

First, we need to take a look at some of the negative things that Peter did. Remember the time the disciples were out at sea in the middle of a bad storm? Jesus came walking to them on the water. It was Peter, who ask to walk out on the water to Jesus. It was also Peter who began to sink into the sea when his fear proved bigger than his faith.

How about the time when Jesus told the disciples of his coming crucifixion and death. It was Peter who spoke up. “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” Peter dared to disagree with Jesus. His brazenness earned a sharp rebuke from his Master. “Get behind me, Satan.”

It was Peter who wanted to build shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. It was Peter who questioned Jesus about how many times to forgive someone. He figured seven was plenty. It was Peter who thought Jesus was a little odd because Jesus wanted to know who touched him when he was surrounded by people. It was Peter who balked at Jesus’ example of servanthood when Jesus wanted to wash Peter’s feet. It was Peter who used his sword on the high priest’s servant in Gethsemane.

It was Peter, good ol’ Peter, who was the first to say, “Even if all fall away on account of

you, I never will. Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” A promise which didn’t last long. A promise not taken too seriously as Peter slept while Jesus prayed. Even after Jesus had asked him to stay awake and watch.

And in tonight’s text, we see Peter squirming and lying. We see Peter, not boldly confessing Jesus, but boldly denying Jesus. We see Peter, not willing to go to the limit of death for Jesus, but doing his best to avoid the fate that Jesus was facing.

Peter did many things that didn’t make him a good witness for Jesus. But, in Peter’s defense, I’ll say this. It was only Peter who had enough moxie to get out of the boat in a raging storm. It was only Peter who took action to protect Jesus, even if he was wrong. It was only Peter who took his questions about forgiveness to the only real expert on forgiveness. Peter did some things wrong but he also did some things right.

It was Peter who gave such a stirring sermon on Pentecost that 3000 people were touched by God’s truth and believed. It was Peter and John who after being beaten rejoiced over the fact they were counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of their Lord Jesus. It was Peter who faced the Pharisees and boldly told them that he would rather obey God than men. And, if tradition holds true, it was Peter who was dedicated enough to Jesus to be crucified upside down rather than deny his Lord.

Now, all this talk about Peter makes two very important points. Point one, Jesus was in his relationship with Peter for the long haul. Jesus never turned away from Peter no matter how boneheaded Peter got. Jesus was willing to forgive and forget Peter’s lapses of faith, his elementary questions, his frequent misunderstanding, and his hollow brags.

Jesus was patient with Peter because Jesus loves Peter. Jesus also had a mission for Peter. Jesus looked, not at what Peter was but at what Peter could be. Jesus had faith in Peter even when Peter didn’t have faith in Jesus.

Point two is what happened to Peter when Peter saw what Jesus saw. When Peter gave up on himself and gave himself up to Christ, Peter became a new man. He went from cut-and-run Peter to stand-and-witness Peter. With Jesus in full control of his life, Peter went from making hollow brags to declaring the truth of God. When Peter finally put Jesus first and Peter last, he could bravely face anything Satan could throw at him, even death.

That’s Peter. What about you? Is there something in all of this that speaks to you? Yes, there’s something here for you. There’s something here for you because Peter’s faux pas weren’t anything special. Any one of us could substitute our name for Peter’s name in various stories of Peter’s life. It works like this.

“Here I am, Lord. You can depend on me. Just give me the chance, Lord. I’ll do your work. I’ll carry the torch of your truth on the sea of life.” But, when the time comes, you feel the eyes of the world on you and you break. You drown in the sea of your own good intentions.

Or, you could bring up the times you didn't want to follow God's plan for your life because it didn't line up with your plan. You could dig skeleton after skeleton out of the closet until, like Peter, you run away in shame. You bury your head in your hands and you cry tears of regret that well up from the very bottom of heart.

That's the bad news. Here's the good news. Jesus knows you, just like he knew Peter. Jesus loves you just as much as he loves Peter. Jesus knows every one of your slips, blunders, stumbles, and bumbles. And Jesus loves you so much that, just like with good ol' Peter, Jesus forgives them and he forgets them. And that's not the end.

Jesus has a mission for you. Jesus has a mission for you that's just as important as Peter's mission. Jesus has handpicked you to be his missionary to the world, just like Jesus handpicked Peter. Your mission may not be to deliver the Gospel to thousands. Your mission might be to deliver the Gospel to just a handful. But your mission is as important as Peter's mission because God is interested in every one of his lost children finding their way home – every one.

What's that? You say you're not qualified to witness to the Gospel. You say your past is a bit too shady or a bit too racy to be a good witness for Christ. Well, shake hands with good ol' Peter. I'm sure you and him have much in common. In fact, you have so much in common with Peter that Jesus can do for you what he did for Peter.

Put yourself in Christ's hands. Arrange your life with Jesus first and you last. Give yourself over completely to Christ and see what wonderful changes he can bring into your life. Let the Lord shape your life and, just like Peter, you'll be exactly the witness that he wants you to be.