

Prayer of Illumination:

“Creator--now Lamb to be slain help us to listen,  
So that this scripture will not be worship wallpaper  
but rather a wake up call to wisdom, wonder and transformation.  
Help us to hear your Word.  
Give us the grace to respond in faithful obedience. Amen

May God’s word challenge and change you, disturb you and comfort you.  
Mark 14: 27-31; 66-72  
The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

---

Peter is known for his clumsy but exuberant ways. Fredrick Beucher said of Peter:  
“Peter said the wrong thing..., or asked the wrong question, or got the wrong point,  
or at least failed to do the thing that was right.”

Peter is impulsive, excited, a leader. And oh so sure.  
And so our story for today makes sense. He’s pulling another “Peter” moment.  
Jesus begins: you will all fall away. (27) for as sheep scatter when their shepherd  
goes missing, so will you flee me.

Peter JUMPS up and declares. NO even if everyone else falls away! I will  
NOT!

Oh yes you will...before the rooster crows twice you’ll have denied me 3  
times.

“Even if I have to die I will never disown you!”

It’s clear he loves Jesus. And I mean. If you put yourself in their shoes.  
They’d given everything up to follow this man for the past three years.  
They’d helped him heal people, seen the miracles, figured out to a certain  
extend that this was Jesus! God! The Messiah. It’d be a shock to hear there  
was something that could happen that would cause them to desert the guy  
who was now like family.

And then comes the fateful moment. Judas betrays Jesus; Jesus is arrested in  
Gethsemane by armed soldiers; and every single disciple, including Peter, flee.  
There’s s strange little verse...verse 42: “Peter followed Jesus at a distance,  
right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and  
warmed himself at the fire.

Peter fled. That's for sure. But now, he's here as close to Jesus as he can get. Sitting waiting for a verdict. He's warming himself with guards who would ultimately lead Jesus to his death. But he's there... we don't hear of the other disciples. But Peter is there.

And while he is there he is found out. "You were with him!" One of the servant girls said to him. And suddenly within the next few moments he denies he knew Jesus. Three full times.

"No. I don't know or understand what you're talking about."

Again he denied it.

"I don't know this man you're talking about!" And called down curses on himself to prove it to her.

Three being a number to tell us he'd done so just as fully as he said he wouldn't.

He goes against everything he'd hoped and desired to do. He did everything he thought he wouldn't.

Not only does he deny Jesus, but he also does not die with him.

And who can blame him. If we put ourselves in Peter's shoes for a moment, it's easy to see that we might have done something similar. He is under pressure. His leader, his loved one—rounded up for no just reason, by armed soldiers. And the guards who would bring Jesus to his death are sitting RIGHT THERE! Probably they could be on the hunt for him to....they'd have his head too if they wanted it.

He loves Jesus. He's made a promise. And he's under pressure. The pressures reveals the weakness he thought he didn't have. The way of behaving he had hoped he wouldn't do.

And when the rooster crows a second time, he comes face to face with himself. Face to face with the reality that under pressure he did the opposite of what he'd done.

Augustine put it well: "God knows in us even what we ourselves do not know in ourselves. For Peter did not know his weakness when he

heard from the Lord that he would deny him three times” (*Tractate on John 32.5*).<sup>1</sup>

And so when the rooster crows, he comes face to face with his own self and runs away to weep. He has to reckon with what it meant that he’d been unfaithful to his promise and the one he loved. He had to recognize his pain, his weakness, his fear to process what he had done.

*When this gospel was written, the early church was also under pressure. To be faithful to the way of Jesus in their world, or to follow the emperor Nero and the religion he had made for his people. If they didn’t follow Nero they would be arrested and die. This story served as an invitation to be faithful to the way of Christ.*

We too find ourselves under pressure. Not the same kind of pressure the early church did, or Peter. We do not fear for our lives if we deny Jesus.

But we are under pressure. We used to just have the pressure of daily life. And now we have the pressure of a virus, which has changed our economy, our way of life, our jobs, our relationships, the very way we’ve done life. And this is hard. I have heard from many of you that life is hard right now. And we are under pressure.

Faithfulness to our promises, faithfulness to the way of Jesus is required in every circumstance. Even the hard ones.

But the thing about being under pressure is that like Peter, we also know that sometimes pressure makes us do things we never intended, reveals our weaknesses we’d kept so well hidden from others.

Maybe, like me, you’re realizing that the panic you’re feeling is just revealing the fear that always lived right below the surface. Or, like me, you’ve noticed yourself more angry and distrustful than you thought you were.

Or, like me, you’ve noticed just how much control and independence you relied on so you didn’t have to feel vulnerable or receive care or love from others.

---

<sup>1</sup> Witherington, B., III. (2001). [\*The Gospel of Mark: a socio-rhetorical commentary\*](#) (p. 378). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Or like me, how you just want to hoard all the eggs (I don't know why eggs, but eggs!) so you can survive...and then only after a little while realize you could be generous too.

We react funny and sometimes against our better judgment under pressure. Sometimes in healthy ways, but also in unhelpful ways. It's a little unsettling to come face to face with ourselves. Realizing that perhaps we thought we'd be uncompromisingly the same person under pressure as you said you would. There are temptations we didn't know existed.

And like Peter, in times like this, we come face to face with ourselves.

Now, I'm always a person who will tell you I believe that our feelings are feelings. And feelings are data—they tell us something important, and they need to be addressed, and they are real. They are real. And they need to be looked and we need to have a chat with them. This is in some ways, the Christian tradition of confession and lament. Look them in the face. Expose them.

This is the dying to self, so we might rise with Christ. the dying to self, so we might have a heart of flesh put in us. Not because we are ashamed. We do not need to do anything to get God to love us. And yet, to grow, to become, to mature. We confront ourselves and find God faithful.

We must look at our experiences, our feelings, ourselves in the face sometimes because these things do not need to dictate and determine our responses. They do not need to move our life—simply because we are angry, does not mean we act out of it; if we are afraid does not mean we must act out of it.

Faithfulness is required of us no matter the circumstances.

- a. At every moment in history.

I don't think Jesus tells Peter and the disciples they will betray him because he's angry or upset, but because he too is wrestling with what will come for him. He too will be put under pressure, temptations on every side, and he is able to continue because he is wrestling with God and relying on God.

Jesus is about to face, abandonment, betrayal, injustice, hardship, pain, suffering, death. Alone. And knows the temptations that come under pressure. It is this God who we can rely on....a great high priest who has For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

I'm not sure about you, but for me, it's so easy to get caught up in this moment. The stories we're hearing, the fear from the media, the pressure of everything. But there's a bigger question that we as followers of Christ are invited to....what does faithfulness to Christ and to Christ's way of life look like at this time?

Faithfulness might look like: washing your hands, staying at home, keeping your distance. It might also look like: volunteering, sharing, growing in character or prayer or parenthood. Or maybe one day it will mean we be like the nuns in the Spanish flu who answered the call and went to be nurses though they had no training and put their very own life at risk.

But the reality is. It's hard to know what faithfulness looks like when everything is so topsy turvy, new and pressure filled.

There's this prayer. From St. Claude La Colmiere, SJ that has been helpful for me I think.

“ Jesus, I feel within me a great desires to please you but, at the same time, I feel totally incapable of doing this without your special light and help, which I can expect only from you. Accomplish your will within me—even in spite of me.”<sup>2</sup>

There is this one little verse perhaps you've looked over...31—the very last part. Peter insisted emphatically. Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. ***And all the others said the same.***

---

<sup>2</sup> Hearts on Fire, Praying with the Jesuits, page 33.

All the disciples promised the same thing as Peter. And yet, he is left by himself in the You'll notice that all the disciples had promised the same thing as Peter had. And he is left alone.

I wonder if they had all stuck together, all followed at a distance, all sat in the courtyard together, if things would've turned out any differently.

The reality is we need each other, we need the church, the fellow disciples to figure out what it might mean to be faithful in this time, under this pressure. Just like I think Peter needed his fellow disciples.

There's one other little tiny beautiful verse in our passage worth noting...vs 28. Jesus has told them they will all abandon him. And then he says...But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.

The disciples abandoning Jesus is not the end of the story or the end of them following Jesus. there is a promise of reunion in Galilee following the resurrection. Galilee will be a place of restoration to Jesus and renewal.

And so he gives hope and grace saying: They will be reunited with each other and with Jesus.

And Jesus, when he returns, restores Peter. And the disciples. And they continue to serve Christ in the world after Jesus ascends to heaven.

And we, like the disciples, don't do better at following Christ in this because we try harder or understand more fully but because we have a great high priest who has gone before us, sent the Spirit to help and instruct us, giving us gifts of the Spirit and the love of the Father to guide us.

Like the disciples were simply doing the best they could at that time, so are we. We are overwhelmed, things are uncertain, we are under pressure. And we might indeed make a few mistakes, react poorly and have to confront our own weaknesses and fears as we live through this moment of history.

We're all just learning. Trying to cope, trying to figure things out.

And so we can hear this verse as assurance.

That when we fall short of love, generosity, kindness, compassion, patience, as we try to figure out all this now, we know Christ is going ahead of

us, renewing, remaking, restoring and healing us still. Relying on the great high priest who is there for us in all these times. Even now.

We can rely on the love of the Father, the wisdom and guidance and gifts of the Spirit, and the grace and mercy of Christ who has suffered too.

I'm going to close with these 2 prayers:

“Show, O Lord, your ways to me, and teach me your paths. Direct me in your truth, and teach me; for you are God my Savior”<sup>3</sup>

“So act, good Jesus, that, in my relationships with whatever neighbor and in all I do fo the furthering of your Father’s glory and the salvation of others, I form myself on your pattern; that I be a genuine reflection of your moderation, gentleness, humility, patience, graciousness, tireless zeal, in a word, of all your virtues; and, in order to engrave them in my soul, live eternally in me.”<sup>4</sup>

Please know that if you are struggling, in need of anything, even just to chat, Pastor Chad and Pastor Dayna are here for you. Give us a call, a text, a message, an email—please reach out to us or to your elder/deacon. Do not be a stranger! Let us care for you.

---

<sup>3</sup> Hearts on Fire, Praying with the Jesuits, Prayer by Blessed Peter Faber, SJ, page 93.

<sup>4</sup> Hearts on Fire, Praying with the Jesuits, Prayer by Jean-Pierre MEdaille, SJ, page 92.