

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’” <sup>32</sup> But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” <sup>33</sup> Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” <sup>35</sup> Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.

~Prayer~

*O Lord, grant us grace to trust Your strength, and not our own. Amen.*

### *Holy Week Prophecies: Desertion and Denial*

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Jesus had made prophecies about his suffering and death. He had explained to his disciples what he would endure and the evil that would be brought against him. After Jesus had instituted the Supper of his body and blood he was with his disciples on the Mount of Olives and he now foretold what would happen to them, which would fulfill the words of the prophet Zechariah, **“I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered”** (Zechariah 13:7). Judas would betray Jesus into the hands of the religious leaders and be struck. In fear for their own lives, Jesus’ disciples, his own flock, would scatter and desert their Lord and Shepherd.

This was just too much for Peter to believe. He wouldn’t and couldn’t listen to Jesus’ words. Peter turns and looks Jesus in the eyes and says, “You’re wrong, Jesus. You don’t have to worry about me. I won’t leave you. Even if everyone else leaves you, I will stand by your side. I will never fall away.” Peter contradicts Jesus and makes his own prediction. Yet, Jesus tells Peter that not only would he leave Jesus, but he would deny him three times that very night before the rooster crows. Then Peter makes his bold confession, **“Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!”**

There is no doubt Peter meant what he said, but Jesus knew, that instead of dying, Peter would lie and deny to save his own life. Contrary to his grand words, Peter would completely disown his Lord and Master, not by silence, but by three loud and forceful declarations.

This account is important for all of us to ponder. We learn here how dangerous it is to presume and to rely on our own strength. Peter was so confident in himself that he believed he could never fall. “I will never fall away... I will never deny you!” Yet, instead of making promises that he could not keep, Peter should have been praying to God to be with him and not let him sink. But he relied on his own strength. And so, he fell.

Like someone who has eyes bigger than their stomachs, we often think we are stronger than we really are. Even as we hear about Peter’s fall we are tempted to think, “I can’t believe he did that” or “I would never do that.” When we hear that after being accused of being one of

Jesus' disciples a third time, Peter began to curse and swear that he did not know Jesus, we are shocked to learn that the Lord witnessed this denial. Scripture records, **"And 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, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times'"** (Luke 22:60-61). Right as Peter was frantically denying knowing Jesus, Jesus happened to be led through the courtyard. It's hard to imagine the remorse and shame that Peter must have felt after he denied Jesus. We are told, **"And he went out and wept bitterly"** (Luke 22:62).

It would be a terrible thing to deny Jesus like Peter did. Yet, wouldn't it be even worse, if Peter showed no regret or sorrow? Wouldn't it have been even more shameful for Peter to act as if it really was not a big deal? Wouldn't it have been more alarming if Peter acted as if he hadn't done anything "that bad" when he saw the resurrected Christ?

Every sin that we commit is a denial of Christ. And our sin is never hidden from God—he sees everything. He knows the sinful thoughts that run through our minds and hears every careless word we speak. He sees us when we damage or take something that doesn't belong to us. He sees us when speak poorly of our neighbor. He sees us when we fail to stand up for what is right and confess the truth. He sees us when we join in with the crowds and seek comfort by the fires of this sinful world. But how often do we act like our sins are not sins and a denial of Christ?

Perhaps the only greater sin than denying Christ is when we deny that we sin against him and deny how serious our sin is. There is no such thing as a small sin. The hymn verse reminds us (ELH 297:3),

*3. Ye who think of sin but lightly  
Nor suppose the evil great  
Here may view its nature rightly,  
Here its guilt may estimate.  
Mark the Sacrifice appointed,  
See who bears the awful load;  
'Tis the Word, the Lord's anointed,  
Son of Man and Son of God.*

We can't save ourselves from our sin nor do we have the strength to keep ourselves in the faith. Our lesson shows this with the example of Peter. Yet, this lesson isn't as much about Peter as it is about what Christ suffered for our sakes. As Peter denied Jesus, Jesus was redeeming Peter and all people. He was abandoned so that we wouldn't have to be. Jesus suffered what we truly deserve so that we wouldn't have to. He is the innocent Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world.

Jesus knew that his disciples would abandon him. He knew all that he would endure. Yet, none of the suffering that would come his way deterred him from his mission to save our souls. In fact, this is why Scripture exhorts us to look to Jesus, **"The author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame"** (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus went forward with "joy," because he was setting out to

accomplish our salvation—the salvation of even those who have denied and sinned against him.

After Peter denied Jesus and saw him, he went out and wept bitterly. He realized the magnitude of what he had done. He knew Jesus' warning that anyone who denies him, he would also deny before his Father in heaven. Nevertheless, Peter did not despair because he also remembered the words which the Lord had often spoke—that he had come into this world to call poor sinners to repentance. Christ would go before Peter in Galilee and restore him to himself. Peter had this promise. Later, Peter would confess Christ three times, just as he had denied him three times (John 21). Jesus forgave Peter and would even use him to boldly proclaim this forgiveness to others!

Paul writes, **“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”** (Romans 15:4). The account of Peter gives us hope. There is no sin beyond forgiveness. There is nothing that you have done or failed to do, that cannot be forgiven and healed. Our sins may be great, but Jesus is greater than our sins. When the Holy Spirit shows you your sin through the Law, don't run from God but to him. When you see what Jesus suffered, you should realize that there is no sin that he did not pay for. You don't have to die for him, because he died for you. Your sins are forgiven. You have been reconciled with God. None of us are part of God's family because we have earned it. We are all members by God's grace. Jesus is a friend and Savior of sinners. He welcomes those who confess their sins and believe in him.

When Peter trusted in his own strength, he fell. Yet, through this experience he learned to put his confidence in God alone. As he later wrote, **“You are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation”** (I Peter 1:5). Just as Peter was kept in the faith through Christ's prayer and help, so too are we kept in the faith through Christ's help. This is why we gather as Christians around the means of grace, God's word and sacraments, because these are the means through which Christ forgives us, strengthens us, and keeps us in the one true faith. Jesus promises, **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand”** (John 10:27–28). Amen.