

April 1, 2020 - Mid-week
It's All about Denial, Luke 22:54–62

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sin is a slippery slope. In our series we've seen the extent of Peter's slide—all the way from pride to complacency to misunderstanding to distancing his discipleship to bad company. Now tonight each of us must say, "It's Jesus, Peter, and me; and it's all about denial." Tonight, Peter denies Jesus, and so have we. Is there any hope for Peter and for us who have found ourselves somewhere along that same slippery slope? Yes, there is. The Jesus whom we deny died to forgive and restore us.

Our Lord was denied by Peter on the night before his death. Peter had first boldly declared his loyalty to Christ, even unto death. But suddenly Jesus is taken captive, and Peter is overwhelmed by fear. It drives him to panicky flight. But not for long. Soon he is following at a safe distance. He even ventures into the court of the high priest's palace, where Jesus is on trial. The kind warmth of the fire kindled in the courtyard is so inviting, and Peter sits at the fire with the servants. This is his undoing. A servant girl tauntingly asserts that he was with Jesus. Now he finds himself in a desperate situation. A lie leaps to his lips, "Woman, I do not know him" (v 57).

Then someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter denies it. "Man, I am not." About an hour later, "still another insisted, saying, 'Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.'" Again Peter denies it. "Man, I do not know what you are talking about" (vv 58–60). By now Peter had made his point, perhaps more clearly than he realized. He has denied his Lord three times.

You and I know something of Peter's experience. Like Peter, we are not always alert to spiritual danger. A sudden temptation catches us off guard, and we embrace the sin. We know better, but we're afraid to say no or we don't want to say no. The sinful pressure of the moment turns us away from Christ. **That's denial.**

We deny Jesus by speaking or by not speaking, by doing or by not doing. **It's a reflection of our heart, where we say yes to our fears or to sin's siren call or to the devil's deception, and we say no to Christ.** The result is bitter—in fact, it should be absolutely terrifying!—because the judgment of Christ rests upon it: "Whoever denies me before men," Jesus said, "I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 10:33).

But Jesus turned and looked at Peter. And whatever else there may have been in that look, there was surely love and compassion. That look was Peter's call to repentance and restoration. Because Jesus died for our sins and rose again, because God laid on him the sins of us all, because Christ gave his life to ransom us, because his blood cleanses us from all sin, there is forgiveness and a new beginning for those who look

to him in repentance and faith. Peter is witness to the fact that the lost can be restored, that sins are forgiven, that the fallen are raised, and that life begins again. Jesus had warned Peter, "The rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me" (Lk 22:34). When the rooster crowed, Peter remembered and wept bitterly the tears of repentance.

The Word of God rouses us, like a rooster's crowing; it warns and admonishes us and calls for our repentance. But even more, the rooster's crow heralds the dawn. The message is that we can leave behind the night and the darkness of sin and denial to greet the dawn and the sunlight of God's mercy and grace in Christ.

What happened to Peter happens also to us. Not that all temptation is over, not that all failure is past, not that sin no longer blots the record. But this is our hope. We live by our Lord's forgiving grace. Every day can be put to rest in this forgiving word from God: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool" (Is 1:18). The new day can begin like a beautiful winter morning, when you look out on the wonder of new-fallen snow that has covered completely the grime and grit of the day before. When our hearts weep over our sins, the forgiveness of Jesus heals our souls. And life is new again. This is the story of Jesus, Peter, and each of us. Amen.

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