**Luke 22:54-62** March 13, 2019

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Mid-week Lent #2

*Luke 22:54 Seizing [Jesus], they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. 55But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. 56A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “This man was with him.” 57But he denied it. “Woman, I don’t know him,” he said.*

 *58A little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” “Man, I am not!” Peter replied.*

 *59About an hour later another asserted, “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.” 60Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” 62And he went outside and wept bitterly.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

 If there were a show of hands for people’s favorite Bible character (of course, Jesus can’t be in the mix), but of all the other people—if you put the twenty best known Bible personalities on a ballot and asked people, “Who is your favorite Bible character?”, I am pretty sure that the Apostle Peter would win. So many times over the years, I have heard people explain how they love the Apostle Peter. There is a realness, a straightforwardness to the man that we love, and dare I say it, that we wish we would have.

 The man from the Bible we call Peter didn’t start life that way. He started as Simon. The first time Jesus met him, Jesus looked at him and said, “I’m going to call you Peter.” “Do I get a say?” “No.”

 “Peter” means rock. That’s how we think of him, right? Peter, the rock? But was he a rock? At just this point the NIV study Bible note confronts me with the truth. It says, “In the Gospels, Peter was anything but a rock; he was impulsive and unstable…” He was exactly the sort of person who would get elected class president sophomore year of high school. Strength of character? Yes. Conviction? Yes. Leadership? Yes. Instability?... Hah! In spades!

 Well, the next time we see Jesus and Peter, Jesus is preaching. Peter isn’t listening. Peter was washing his fishing nets. To get his attention Jesus commandeered his fishing boat, and went on a fishing trip with him. Jesus miraculously gave Peter the catch of his life. Do you remember what Peter said after his helping of crow pie out in the middle of the lake in the boat? Peter said to Jesus, *“I am a sinful man; Go away from me, Lord!”* I wonder if Jesus laughed. “Peter, we’re out in the middle of the lake! Can I wait till we get to shore or you want me to step out now?” (Actually Jesus said, *“Don’t be afraid.”*)

 Not too much later we are again on the lake in a boat with Peter. This time Jesus is not in the boat, but out there walking on the lake in gale-force winds. Peter—again you wonder if his brain is connected to his mouth—says, *“Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.”* How much sense there was in Peter’s request, I don’t know, but there was faith. There was faith that “sensible” people usually don’t have a smidgen of. And Peter walked on water with Jesus for a while. Till he didn’t. Till his reason started to catch up with his faith and he got afraid. Well, he survived.

 A year or so later Jesus asked his Twelve who he was. Even though there may have been smarter guys in the bunch, Peter was the only one who got the answer right, or at least the only one brave enough to say it, *“You are the Son of the living God.”* Jesus praised him saying, *“Blessed are you.”* Jesus didn’t do that often.

 But it’s almost like Peter can’t stand success. Literally the next thing we hear about Peter is that he took Jesus aside and started an argument with him! Jesus shot a withering rebuke at him, *“Get behind me, Satan!”*

 Again and again Peter grabs life by the scruff of the neck, and more often than not gets bitten. But we love it. We love him. Because he is so like us.

 Nowhere is this more true that in Jesus’ last day. When they were eating what Jesus knew would be their last meal together, Jesus told Peter, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.” Do you remember Peter’s response? It was exactly the same thing you would say to your spouse or child or parent or best friend. “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”

 That night, Peter was determined to live up to his words. Real soldiers came to arrest Jesus, a whole company. The twelve disciples between them had two short swords. But Peter would prove to Jesus that he was honorable and true, willing to die, and he drew his sword and struck. Jesus quickly said, “No more of this!” There must have been thunder in his voice because trained soldiers who have a sword drawn on them don’t let it pass. But Jesus bottled up the chaos. The disciples ran, Peter too.

 What was Peter to do? He hadn’t denied Jesus. He had valiantly tried to save Jesus, but Jesus didn’t want saving? What could he do? *And now I read this evening’s reading:*

**Reading (up to verse 60a)**

 Even if none of the other disciples did, Peter would follow Jesus. He would prove his devotion to Jesus. He would go with Jesus into the lion’s den. And there it happened.

 How we want to fight the battle, to defend flag, family and faith. Willing to fight to the death, to suffer all, and then, then… then the smallest thing.

 Not a soldier with a drawn sword, but a slave, a female slave, a slave girl makes a comment. He didn’t see that one coming. Whether it was her or Satan aiming that punch, it landed. Peter wanted to fight soldiers, not slave girls. He denied Jesus. The first denial tumbled out of his mouth and started an avalanche of denials. Denials and oaths, not even wanting to be associated with those crazy Galileans – “But how do you explain that Galilean accent if you’re not a Galilean? Hah, hah, hah!” Peter’s denials ringing more and more false, and the crowd of mocking faces in the firelight amused by this unthreatening cowardly liar.

 ***“The rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.”***

 “Dear Jesus, how I wanted to serve you, to save you, to honor you!” But he failed completely.

 We love Peter, and we want to go out with him into the darkness and put our arm around his shoulder and say nothing, because he is just like us. We recognize ourselves in this frustrated and shamed disciple.

 All the other religions of the world let you draw lines. They let you draw lines so you stand on one side and look down your nose at all the sinners on the other side. It’s salvation by comparison.

 Christianity is the one religion where you have to look in the mirror of God’s law and say, “I am a sinner.” You say it when you come to faith. And you have to say it day after day, because God has drawn the lines. Every day the lines that God has drawn convict us. Each of the commandments about love and gentleness and patience and contentment. Each time we cross one of those lines we are reminded that Jesus had to die for that one too.

 That is when Jesus makes eye contact with us. We look at him being led from one sham trial to another, and we realize —with knowledge that Peter did not have that night when he denied Jesus— we look at Jesus and realize that our job isn’t to somehow save him from this death. That’s what Peter thought he was supposed to do. Our job is simply to watch, to be amazed, as he goes to death for us, willingly, even joyfully; to let him make the sacrifice.

 As Jesus makes eye contact with us sinners after each of our sins, we expect to see a look of reproach, of accusation. But we do not. Jesus is not bitter about his sacrifice for us. There is no regret. His pain is not begrudged. The only thing is a prayer and an invitation, that those who are forgiven in his death would understand, and trust in him. Amen.