

INI - SDG

3rd Mid-Week Lenten Service
March 23, 2011
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Hecla, SD

*Jesus, grant that balm and healing In Thy holy wounds I find,
Ev-ry hour that I am feeling Pains of body and of mind.
Should some evil tho't within Tempt my treach'rous heart to sin,
Show the peril, and from sinning Keep me ere its first beginning. Amen. (TLH 144:1)*

Lenten Theme: PROFILES OF THE PASSION

3) Peter - Profile of Denial

Text: Luke 22:61-62 ***And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." 62 So Peter went out and wept bitterly.***

(Taken from 1 Peter 1:1-5) To the pilgrims of the Dispersion (at Prince of Peace), elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

My name is Simon, son of Jonah. But you probably know me better by the name which Jesus gave me, Peter. Tonight I have been asked to share with you my profile and help you to see something about yourself. I think you will be surprised how much you and I have in common.

Allow me first to share a little about myself and my background. I grew up in the Galilean town of Bethsaida, on the Northwestern shores of the Sea of Galilee. Over time my brother Andrew and I moved to the town of Capernaum, where we took up the fishing trade with two other would-be apostle brothers, James and John.

My brother Andrew, like John, was a disciple of John the Baptist. And it was actually Andrew that first brought me to Jesus. After John the Baptist had pointed out Jesus to Andrew as the Lamb of God, my brother followed Jesus and spent the day with Him. Andrew came found me and told me that he had found the promised Messiah, the one that the prophets had spoken of. And more than just telling me about Jesus, Andrew actually physically brought me to Jesus. And it was at that moment that my life changed. Upon Jesus seeing me, He said, ***"You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone).*** Cephas is Aramaic for the Greek name of Peter, which you are all quite familiar with.

It wouldn't be until much later that I understood why Jesus gave a name that means "A Stone." At one point during the three years that I followed Jesus and was taught by Him, Jesus asked us what people were saying about Him - who they thought He was. Well, there were various opinions among the people as to who Jesus was. Some people thought He might be John the Baptist or the prophet Jeremiah, back from the dead. Other people thought that maybe the prophet Elijah had returned from heaven.

Jesus then asked us who we thought Jesus was. I couldn't help myself from speaking up. I had no doubt about who Jesus was. I believe the same thing about Jesus as you believe. I said, **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** I said that because I was certain that Jesus really was the prophesied Messiah, just as my brother Andrew told me. But as He taught us and we saw all the good things He did, I knew that He was true God, the Son of God. Is this not the same thing that you just said about Jesus earlier in your worship service?

Jesus then revealed to me that the reason I was so confident about who He was, was because God had revealed this truth to me. **"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."** (Mt 16:17-18) I didn't just believe that Jesus was the promised Christ, the Son of the living God because Andrew had told me that. I believed that because God Himself had created faith in my heart. Faith which believed the rock-solid truth that Jesus is the Son of God. The rock-solid truth that Jesus would build His Church upon. The rock-solid truth that all believers would confess - just as you believe and confess. So rock-solid that Hell was powerless against it. And so I began to see why Jesus called me Peter, which means "a Stone," after He spoke of the rock-solid confession I gave about who Jesus is.

But for me, it was often one step forward, two steps back. No sooner had I spoken this rock-solid truth about Jesus, then I said something stupid. Jesus had just said how blessed I was because of what God had revealed to me. Jesus then went on to talk about His suffering, death, and resurrection. This was an offensive thought to me! The thought of Jesus being mistreated and put to death was unbearable. I pulled Jesus aside and I actually rebuked Jesus for what He had said! How foolish of me to rebuke the Christ, the Son of the living God. **"Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"** (Mt 16:22) Somehow I thought I knew better than Jesus.

What I didn't realize, but Jesus did, was that Satan using my words to tempt Jesus to not go through with His Passion. Jesus promptly rebuked me, saying, **"Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."** (Mt 16:23) So Jesus went from speaking about how blessed I was because of what God had revealed to me, to calling me Satan for tempting Him not to go through with His mission. This is kind of a summary of my life of following Jesus. I was so often bold and confident, which was not a good quality but a weakness.

My involvement in the events of Jesus' suffering and death, is my greatest shame and embarrassment. It is an account that you hear of every year, so I'm sure you are quite familiar with it. After we had finished celebrating the Passover with Jesus and He had instituted the Lord's Supper, we left the Upper Room and headed to the Garden of Gethsemane. Along the way, Jesus said these ominous words, **"All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"** (Mt 26:31) Jesus was warning us - all of us, including me! Jesus was making known that another prophecy of the Old Testament would be fulfilled when we would abandon Him that night.

Once again, I thought I knew better than Jesus - and for that matter, better than the

Old Testament! I boldly promised Jesus, **"Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble."** I just couldn't imagine myself stumbling, and falling into sin on account of Jesus! Jesus warned me, **"Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."** This couldn't be! Jesus couldn't be right! He was my God, my Savior, my Teacher, and my Friend! How could I ever deny Him once - let alone three times and all in that very night! I told Jesus He was wrong, **"Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"** I was ready to stand at Jesus' side - all the way to death, if I had to!

I thought I was pretty strong. I thought my faith could handle anything that came my way. What I didn't realize was just how weak I was. That night, the very thing Jesus warned me about, the very thing I told Jesus He was wrong about, took place. After Jesus was arrested, John and I followed from a distance, so we could see what was going to happen to Jesus. John was able to get us access to the courtyard of the high priest, where I warmed myself by a fire, with others, paying close attention to what was happening with Jesus.

That is when it began. An unarmed servant girl approached the fire I was sitting at and began staring at me. Then she said, **"This man was also with Him."** I began to panic! What if they found out I was one of Jesus followers? I was in the enemies territory now. They might arrest me as well and treat me like they were treating Jesus! **"Woman, I do not know Him,"** I told her.

But it did not end there. A little while later I was approached again by the servant girl, **"This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth. This is one of them."** She was starting to attract attention. I again denied it. But others started joining in, so I swore to them with an oath, **"Man, I am not. I do not know the Man."** I thought I was off the hook, but about an hour later I was approached a third time, **"Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it."** This couldn't be happening, I thought! Now I am doomed too! I feared for my life! I began to curse and swear, **"I do not know the Man. I do not know this Man of whom you speak."**

Then it happened. The rooster crowed for the second time that night. From where I was I could see Jesus and as the rooster crowed, He turned and looked at me. It was a look that pierced me to my very soul. The very thing I promised Jesus I would never do, I had done, just as He warned me. I was so ashamed of myself. I had denied my Lord! It was so overwhelming, that I ran away crying. There was my Lord suffering scorn and shame, being slapped and spit upon. And what was I doing? Cowering in fear in front of a servant girl, trying to save my hide by denying I was with Him or even knew who He was! My profile is a profile of denial.

My friend, the Apostle Paul, wrote, **"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."** (1 Cor 10:12) I thought I could stand, but boy did I ever fall. But God used my denial to humble me and teach me to find my strength in Him. I needed to see how great of a sinner I was in order to see just how much I needed a Savior. Jesus' look that night, revealed just how weak of sinner I was. But on Easter Sunday morning, I learned the greatness of Jesus' grace and power to save. I ran to the tomb to find that Jesus had risen from the dead. He had paid for all my sins - including my sins of denial. He died to forgive me and He rose to assure me that I was forgiven.

The Lord went on to use me for great things in His church. He used me to deliver a powerful sermon on Pentecost. A powerful sermon which the Holy Spirit used to bring many people to faith in Jesus. Later, as I stood before the same Jewish council that Jesus stood and was commanded to stop preaching about Jesus, HE gave me the strength to defy them and continue preaching the good news about Jesus. And it was Jesus who gave me the strength to remain faithful unto death, when I died a martyrs death even as Jesus told me would happen.

You and I have so much in common! Which one of you doesn't think you believe so firmly in Jesus and your faith in Him is so strong, that nothing would ever deter you from being faithful to Him. Yet, how many times have you denied Jesus? Maybe you didn't curse and swear that you don't even know who Jesus is, but haven't you denied Jesus by your words and actions? Like that time your unchurched friends started making fun of Christians and you joined right in because you didn't want them to make fun of you too. Or that time that you joined in, using the same dirty language that they use, because you didn't want them to think you were different.

What about denying Jesus with love? On the same night I denied Jesus, He said, ***"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*** (Jn 13:34-35) Jesus loved us and died for us! Aren't we denying that we are one of His disciples every time we speak or act unloving toward one another?! What if Jesus looked at you at those times? How would you react? You and I have a great deal in common. We both think we are stronger than we are.

So join me in repenting and humbling yourself before God. Rejoice that Jesus died even for our sins of denial and pride. Run with me to the empty tomb and see that Jesus has risen from the dead! God accepted the payment He made for every last one of your sins and my sins. Look to Him for your strength and rely on Him for your protection. And be amazed, as I was, at how the Lord could use such a foolish sinner like me to do great things in His Kingdom. May Jesus keep you faithful unto the end. Amen.