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Text: Luke 22:54-62

Date: April 13, 2017

Setting: Our Redeemer Lutheran Church Maundy Thursday

Facing Denial

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

One of the most heartbreaking scenes of Holy Week is when Jesus turns and faces Peter, just after Peter has denied him three times. We all know that look, that look that says, "I know what you did, and I am very disappointed." We can only imagine how deeply that look from Jesus bore through Peter to his very soul. The piercing look that led him to run away to drown himself in tears of sorrow and regret.

This scene is so heartbreaking to us because we have all been there in Peter's shoes. We have confessed to Jesus in church and among our brothers and sisters in Christ, "I would never deny him; I would never reject him; I would never abandon him." And yet when we get out in the real world, our resolve dissolves and we are influenced by the opinions of others. We live in a society where we crave the need to be liked and accepted by our peers. After Peter tells Jesus in the comfort of the Upper Room that he would never deny his Lord the Bible says, "And all the disciples said the same." Yet later that night, they, too, would deny Jesus by running away from him and deserting him in the Garden of Gethsemane after he was arrested. Peter was not the only one guilty of denial and guilty of being two-faced when it came to speaking about his relationship with Jesus. He put on the strong, confident face of standing by Jesus no matter what.

But this only happened when he was with Jesus.

A comparison to today would be our culture's allegiance to following sports teams. When attending a home game for your favorite team, or watching with fellow fans, it is easy to be excited for your team. It's easy to shout out, cheer for, and represent your favorite team when you are part of the majority. That is not a problem. But it may become uncomfortable in other situations though. For instance when you attend an away game and you are the only one in your section wearing gold and black and everyone around you are in red and gold. When you are not surrounded by fellow fans, but opposing fans. Our composure changes in these instances, as Peter's did. Fear and worry took over when he was alone in the dark courtyard surrounded by questioning and suspicious faces. His human survival tactics overpowered his spiritual resolve. We see in him the classic case of fight vs. flight. In a dangerous position, he chose flight (that is, denial) rather than fighting for his Savior and saying he was "one of them."

We, like Peter, find ourselves in similar situations in our daily lives as well. We have the "face" we put on at church and "face" we put on at work or school. And sometimes those faces are vastly different. As the saying goes, "We talk the talk, but do we walk the walk"? We may not think that not putting up a cross in our home or not talking about our church with co-workers is anything that serious. If we are afraid to disclose our relationship with Jesus in our very homes and workplaces, then we are indeed denying an essential part of who we are, and we are not living out the call our Savior has given us to be light and salt in this world and to make a difference in this world. The depth of our Christianity reveals itself when we are out in the world. If there

is no depth, then it is easy to mask it. But if our faith in Christ is deep, we cannot help but show it on our faces and speak about what our relationship with Christ means to us.

I find it interesting that Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial occurs immediately after the institution of the Lord's Supper. This says two things. First, it says that the forgiveness of sins granted in Holy Communion is not something that should remain encapsulated in the Upper Room or the walls of a church building. The forgiveness and renewal that we receive in this sacrament should motivate us to speak out about our faith and to be open with others about what being a disciple of Christ has entailed for us. Our faith story should inspire the faith stories of others.

The other thing this timing of Holy Communion and the prediction of Peter's denial tells me is that when we weaken in our faith and deny our Lord in various ways, the sacrament of Holy Communion is already in place to bring us back to Christ. It's there to strengthen our faith for when we face those who might question or ridicule our bond with our Savior. Christ's body and blood in, with and under the bread and wine, given and shed for us on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, is available to us this very night. This very night to help us in our struggle to start over in our faith journey and stop doing all the things that are mini denials of him. Holy Communion, in a way, is Christ looking at us. Though not with the same look he gave to Peter in the courtyard. He is not saying to us saying to us, "I know what you did, and I am very disappointed." But instead what we see is a face of love. We see him looking right at us and saying, "I love you." As we partake of the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, we are letting the love

of Christ sink deep into our souls and become a part of us. And when that love is a part of us, we have the power to be the face of faith to those around us and never deny his place in our lives ever again. Let the love of Christ sink deep into your souls this night as you eat and drink Christ's body and blood, in, with, and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion. And as a result, let your face from now on be a glorious reflection of the love of Christ that you have working within you, which allows you to feed the people of this world with the nourishing news of Christ crucified. Amen.

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine... to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen." Ephesians 3:20-21