

Luke 22:54-62
Midweek Lenten service
February 24, 2010

Luke 22:54-62 (New International Version)

Peter Disowns Jesus

⁵⁴Then seizing him, 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.

"What's this about a rooster?" came the question after the preview of our Lenten series appeared. If your mental picture of a rooster is the cartoon version of Foghorn Leghorn, there would be reason to raise the question. As I recall, he was a blustery bag of wind who repeated himself with, "Now I say, I say..." Or maybe you have memories of being awakened in the early morning by a rooster crowing loudly outside your window, or of being chased by one.

Roosters do have a connection with some churches. On top of the steeple of our home church was a rooster as a weather vane, so a rooster can tell you which way the wind is blowing. I've seen them on others as well, and some were known as the "rooster church." That's not our thought for this evening. We are looking deeper as we ask,

WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM A ROOSTER?

It had to have been a disturbing evening for the disciples and especially for Peter. Think of what they had witnessed in the last several hours. They had gathered with Jesus in an upper room in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. He had washed their feet, a task that belonged to a slave. When Peter objected to letting Jesus do such a menial job, the Master had told him it was necessary and Peter had suggested He wash his hands and head as well. There were puzzling words about betrayal and Judas had left the gathering. At the end of the Passover meal Jesus did something new with remaining bread and wine. He said it was His body and blood and spoke of forgiveness through them. He talked about leaving them and issued a warning that they would be scattered. Peter had vowed his loyalty even if it meant death and Jesus responded with specific words about denying Him.

Jesus and the disciples went outside the city to the Garden of Gethsemane, as they had done many times before. The Savior went there to pray. You could see how drained He was, but

the disciples kept falling asleep and missed most of what was going on. Then came an armed mob with religious leaders and Judas in the lead. They had arrested Jesus. He didn't even try to escape. Peter was ready with his sword and lashed out, cutting off the ear of one of the men. That action received a rebuke from the Master, and He even healed the guy. Then they took Him away.

When we see upsetting events, our emotions often take over. We don't always think things through. We act on impulse, doing whatever strikes our mind first, especially in a mode of self-preservation, or what appears to be in our best interest. So the disciples all ran away from the scene.

II.

Realizing nobody was chasing him, Peter doubled back. He had to see what was going on, but that produced a disturbing denial. He went where the mob had taken Jesus, to the house of the high priest. Although it was late at night, the place was buzzing and the servants were up and about. John was with Peter. Because he was acquainted with the high priest they gained entrance into the courtyard of the dwelling. Some people were gathered there around a fire. It provided light and warmth on a cool evening. That seemed the place to be in the know. Peter joined that group and tried to fit in with the crowd.

That's when a servant girl saw him. Maybe she was the one who had let them in. "She looked closely at him and said, 'This man was with him.'" Was she proud of herself that she recognized him and wanted the others to realize she knew something they didn't? Whatever her reason, it was a "gotcha" moment. Peter was caught off guard. He blurted out, "Woman, I don't know him." Hey—a guy has to do what he has to do. You gotta protect yourself. You don't know what might happen next. We have such good reasons in our own eyes for what we do. Excuses aside, Peter denied Jesus. Where was that bold declaration of faithfulness and willingness to die with Him? He couldn't even handle being identified by a young lady. The night had taken more than one sad turn.

It didn't stop there. Putting together the gospel accounts we realize there may have been more than one servant who ID'd him. Perhaps Peter had stepped away from the fire and gone back toward the entrance, hoping to make an exit. It wasn't any better there. "A little later someone else saw him and said, 'You also are one of them.'" Peter answered just as fast, "Man, I am not!" Same tune, same denial. It gets easier the second time.

It appeared he was not likely to get away, so Peter hung around. Things quieted down. Maybe he relaxed a bit, feeling more comfortable with the situation. Out of the blue, "About an hour later another asserted, 'Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.'" He had the look or the speech of a person from Galilee. John tells us it was a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. Oops! He was found out. So he became more forceful. "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" He even swore he didn't know this Jesus. Imagine that: asking God to witness your denial of Him!

We would never do such an reprehensible act, right? Think again. What about our silence when we should speak up? We're with people who are putting down our Savior or the teachings of His Word. Do we stand up and let it be known what we believe? We may try to fit in and not look different from the world around us. We don't want to stick out as strange. So we join in improper language or behavior that violates God's commands. Look out! The world is not a friend of Jesus. We are to be setting the standards, not following the drumbeat of those marching in the opposite way. Sometimes, far more often than we care to admit, we do not live as believers and let our light shine by honoring God, loving our neighbor and putting His Word into practice. Are we not then following the same path as Peter?

III.

Then sounds the rooster's reminder. The night had worn on. Morning was approaching and the rooster crowed. It wasn't just an act of animal instinct. It made things click for Peter. "Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.'" You can learn something from a rooster. Jesus knows what He is talking about. It happened just as He said. Even though he was

forewarned Peter hadn't been able to stop himself from denying his Lord. Another gospel mentions the rooster had crowed once before. He must have missed that sound. Not this time.

Add to the crowing a look from Jesus. "The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter." We can't be exactly sure what was happening right then, whether Jesus was being transferred and passed by or if Peter was just in His line of sight when He turned and their eyes met. How do you picture the expression on Jesus' face? Do you think it was incredulous, asking, "How could you do such a thing?" Was it angry? Or filled with sadness and disappointment? Or maybe it took no more than a look of recognition. I doubt whether it was an "I told you so" smirk. It was no laughing matter.

Besides the expression on His face, Jesus had received mistreatment during His hearing. Some spit on Him. Was that slime dripping from His face? Others had hit Him. Were there bruises? They would add to the impact of the crowing fowl.

The message hit home. "He went outside and wept bitterly." There were tears of sadness, yes. Peter had committed an awful deed in spite of the Lord's efforts to prepare him and prevent it. But there was more than sorrow in his heart. There was also repentance, which includes the faith that he was forgiven by his Savior. He stands in contrast with the response of Judas, who could see no hope of mercy and when he couldn't undo his treacherous act, hung himself in despair. The look of Jesus had communicated something to Peter. He was there on Easter and at other times when he heard the Savior's words of peace and later he was personally reinstated to feed Jesus' lambs and sheep.

Jesus calls us to repentance. Does His call strike your heart? Tears are not mandatory (they can be faked), but regret is appropriate. Martin Luther spoke about terrors of conscience. See the horror of your sin, especially when beholding what God's Son endured for it. Sin is awful. Admit your guilt. Do not blame others, make excuses for yourself or deny that you have done wrong. Confess your sins and come to Christ for mercy. It is there for you because Jesus continued His path to the cross where He suffered and died for your times of denial as well as for every other sin you have committed. That was not the end. He also rose, showing His victory over sin and completion of the payment for it. You are forgiven, fully and freely.

The rooster sounds a call to remember. We remember the denial by Peter and the Lord's warning against overconfidence, but we also remember the forgiving, loving Savior who went forth to pay for us deniers. Hear the rooster's crowing, be warned, and resolve by the Holy Spirit's power to confess your faith in Jesus before the world, to His glory and for the benefit of those you meet.