

“The Courtyard: A Place of Renewal”

Luke 22:54-62

Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This has got to be one of the goofiest titles for a sermon given its correspondence to this text in Luke 22:54-62. A place of renewal?! This is the account of Peter’s denial of the LORD when the LORD was arrested and within the house of the high priest. Jesus was arrested and His trial had begun, and there was Peter in the darkest time of his life, denying the LORD once, twice, and then a third time...doesn’t this seem like a place of renewal? Yes, I’m being facetious. A place of failure, yes! A place of hypocrisy, absolutely! Recall that Peter came into this courtyard scene having told Jesus: “LORD, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” (Luke 22:33) So, a place of hypocrisy! Again, yes! But a place of renewal? How? This was a place of failure and falling when Satan was seemingly sifting Peter like wheat. A place of sin? A place of guilt? A place of shame? A place of despair? Yes, yes, yes! But a place of renewal? How?

And yet the title of the sermon is not goofy at all, it is astoundingly accurate. This was Peter’s night of blessing. This was Peter’s night of renewal. It was Peter’s chance to see that his call to discipleship was not about his determination to be something or do something: “LORD, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” (Luke 22:33). Peter had his version of what a true believer was to look like. It had to be corrected and realigned; and Peter would be renewed by the grace of God. What about you? What about me?

I struggle with Lent. Don’t get me wrong, I love the season. It is my favorite season of the Church Year. It is indeed the best way to prepare for Easter. But I struggle. To follow the life of our Savior – in the Church Year and in the Sacred Liturgy -- is what we do so that we live in His life, as there is no other lasting life. And as we do, we strive to live in the sacrifices of faith so that faith always remembers Jesus above all other things when we go out into the world. In this way we abide in His love. Lent provides opportunities to contemplate His love for us seen powerfully through His passion. The reason He went through that first Lenten passion for us was out of His great love for us. So this is the reason prayer, fasting, and giving/serving the poor is good for us. These are things that remind us that we do what is less convenient for the flesh to remind ourselves of what is really important: Jesus Christ. Prayer devoted to Him, fasting that says He is more important than the things we delight in, in this world; almsgiving to recall that what we do to the least of these, we do to Him. And yet, our flesh would have us make what “we do” in Lent something which twists the meaning of Lent just as Peter had once done.

Our flesh takes all of this observance, even coming to Church on Wednesday nights (wow, we are actually coming to Church not only on Sundays, but Wednesdays too)! We can

take pride in this. It tempts us to gauge our faith based on what we do and what we resolve. We start to feel like Peter. “LORD, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death!”

I struggle with Lent, because anything I try to do as the fruit of faith for Christ set before me, there is another part of me being just like Peter once was. “LORD, see what I’ve done; see what I’m doing?! I’m ready to go with you both to prison and to death!” We play this game in many ways. It might be in the way we feel so entitled and right to judge other people. But *their* sin is so self-evident. *They* are so wrong, *they* are so off-base. And we do this as a means for self-justification. Silently, it makes us feel better about ourselves. There is something pious and faith-affirming – so we think – when we point out societal and cultural evil; and even when we are so bold and outspoken to judge individuals by name. Our speaking out against evil is a sign of our commitment to God; our commitment to the truth and what is right. “LORD, hear me as I defend what is good and right; and LORD hear me when I speak out against sin and evil! LORD, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death!”

We do this sometimes by going to Church or by not going to Church. Listen to my reasons for going and they make me sound like a good person. Listen to my reasons for not going and they make me sound like a good person. Some go to church so as not to be hypocrites. Some don’t go to church so as to avoid hypocrites. Both do what they do and the sinful nature in both takes that and says, “LORD, see my honesty, my sincerity, my piety; see that I do what I do for such good reasons, for such honest reasons; see my spirituality. LORD, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death!”

Traci and I attend a seminar that is hosted by the boarding school that two of our children attend. At the last seminar, they offered a section on understanding our children better and what they struggle with from a psychological perspective, but in the second section they turned the tables around: this time we had to try to evaluate and understand ourselves as parents. We took a long test with a very long list of self-evaluative questions. For example, “Do you get frustrated, because your children don’t seem to appreciate what you do for them?” I had to stare at this question for a while. I felt that this was never an issue in my life. I simply don’t do for my kids because I need to get something back from them. I do what I do because I love them. But...what about when circumstances are a little more exceptional? What happens when what you do is a little more than what you might typically do? What if there is an even greater demand on your time, your energy, and your money? Hmmm, all of a sudden I realized that this was a good question for me. Sometimes we do this with God. “LORD, look at what I do for you. For my marriage, for my children, for my work. See my dedication. See my sacrifice. I’m living as a true disciple! LORD, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death!” In these instances of our prideful self-inventories that lead us to say what we are and what we’ll do, we are just like Peter was that night in the courtyard.

And then the truth hits and the truth hurts. Peter's determined self-reliance was tested while the LORD had been arrested and had also begun His own trial before men:

First, the servant girl at verse 56 confronts Peter in regards to his relationship with Jesus: "This man also was with him." Verse 57: "But he denied it, saying, 'Woman, I do not know him.'"

Second, someone else at verse 58 confronts Peter in regards also to his relationship with the other disciples: "You also are one of them." Peter denied again: "Man, I am not."

Thirdly and lastly, another confronts Peter about his association with Jesus' powerful Galilean ministry and said as recorded at verse 59: "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." Verse 60: "But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about.'"

Step-by-step through the foundation of Peter's own version of religious faith – built on himself, his determination and his achievement – his entire life was falling apart:

1. He denied the LORD and his personal relationship with Him.
2. He denied the LORD by disassociating himself from the twelve.
3. He denied the LORD by separating himself from the Lord's public ministry.

What was left of Peter? He had denied his whole life! And when that rooster crowed, the LORD looked at Peter from where He was standing in the distance, and Peter remembered what the LORD had said, and he went out and wept bitterly. A night of total collapse. A dark night of failure. A night of shame and hypocrisy. A night when Peter's religion of being ready to go anywhere with the LORD disintegrated.

How easy this happens to us. We put in our all for our marriage, and how easy it can fail; we give our all to our children, and how easy it does not go as we had hoped; we dedicate ourselves to our careers and how often we leave them with bitterness and disappointment? We dedicate ourselves to the LORD and look...it is easy to be like Peter was.

But again, this was Peter's night for blessing and renewal, because truly, renewal cannot come until we give up on ourselves and for us to do that, the LORD must show us the futility of our determination and discipline. Our lives in Christ are not built on our determination and discipline, they are built on Christ. Peter was now defeated and without hope. He wept bitterly, but why did our LORD turn to Peter and look at him precisely at the moment the rooster crowed? Was it to condemn Peter? No. It was to show Peter how much he was loved. While Peter was discovering how lost he was, Jesus was already finding him; he had tracked him and put his eyes upon him even in the moment that led to his bitter tears. The LORD wanted Peter to remember not just His prediction that he would deny Him three times (so that Peter would learn not to build

on himself), but the LORD wanted Peter to remember what the LORD had said to him recorded at Luke 22:32: ***“But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fall. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”***

To Peter it must have seemed as though everything was lost, but it wasn't. The Lord had already prayed that Peter's faith would not fall. This seeming fall; this discovery of his need to abandon himself, was the Lord's way of turning Peter and renewing Peter. It was the LORD's way of teaching Peter to not look upon himself, but to look upon His Savior.

Peter had been tried by people in the courtyard, asking him questions and demanding answers, but Jesus was being tried as well (in the house of the high priest). But Peter's Savior who is your Savior did not lie, He did not flinch, He did not deny, but held the course to be faithful to Father and faithful for you even to the point of going to be crucified. Jesus comes to you and me precisely when we hit bottom and says, “Just when it seems as though there is no way out, I am the WAY for you! Just when you have failed and you can't face the truth, I am the TRUTH who comes in love and mercy to forgive and to restore you! Just when you feel as though your life has crumbled, I am the LIFE that gives new life, renewed life for you.”

“Go forth as my forgiven child, because I have never denied you. Go forth as my beloved child, because I have never stopped loving you. Go forth as my renewed child, because I was faithful to the point of defeating everything and anything that could ever rob you of life.” Be renewed Christian, at the time of your most bitter tears & even when those tears might be only within your souls, Jesus comes. He has prayed for you, so that you may turn again so that you may strengthen your brothers.