

Who? Me?

John 18:15-18, 25-27

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Because this other disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard. ¹⁶ However, Peter stood outside near the gate. Then the other disciple (the one known to the high priest) came out and spoke to the woman stationed at the gate, and she brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The servant woman stationed at the gate asked Peter, "Aren't you one of this man's disciples?"

"I'm not," he replied. ¹⁸ The servants and the guards had made a fire because it was cold. They were standing around it, warming themselves. Peter joined them there, standing by the fire and warming himself.

²⁵ Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing with the guards, warming himself. They asked, "Aren't you one of his disciples?"

Peter denied it, saying, "I'm not."

²⁶ A servant of the high priest, a relative of the one whose ear Peter had cut off, said to him, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?"

²⁷ Peter denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

Now that we have heard the word of God – let us affirm our Faith in God through the words of the Creed of the Korean Methodist Church:

**We believe in the one God,
creator and sustainer of all things, Father of all nations,
the source of all goodness and beauty, all truth and love.
We believe in Jesus Christ,
God manifest in the flesh,
our teacher, example, and Redeemer, the Savior of the world.
We believe in the Holy Spirit,
God present with us for guidance, for comfort, and for strength.**

**We believe in the forgiveness of sins,
in the life of love and prayer,
and in grace equal to every need.
We believe in the Word of God
contained in the Old and New Testaments
as the sufficient rule both of faith and of practice.
We believe in the church,
those who are united in the living Lord
for the purpose of worship and service.
We believe in the reign of God
as the divine will be realized in human society,
and in the family of God,
where we are all brothers and sisters.
We believe in the final triumph of righteousness and in the life
everlasting. Amen.**

Today we continue moving through the final week of Jesus' life – looking at who he was with, what he did, what he said when he knew that time was running out. We spent the last two weeks at the table in the upper room on Thursday evening – now it's time to move out into the night.

They from the Upper room – through the Kidron Valley and then they begin to climb the winding path up the Mount of Olives. While the others probably go back to Bethany to get some sleep – Jesus takes Peter, James, and John along with him into the Garden of Gethsemane – gethsemane means Olive Press – so he takes them to an area that would be busy and noisy during the day – but now it's just the 4 of them and they settle in to pray.

While they were there, and Jesus was fervently praying – Judas – one of his own disciples came with guards and betrayed Jesus to them. Peter – was the first to respond. He pulled his sword and took a swing – and he took off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the High Priest. I have always wondered if Peter was proud in that moment – or if he was trying to pretend that he meant to just take off an ear and not the whole head. Jesus, being Jesus, healed the ear.

The guards took him – like a dangerous criminal – back across the Kidron Valley – and up this set of stairs that led to the home of the High Priest Caiaphas. From the outside entrance - He would have been placed in the holding cells under the house.

Peter had followed the guards and Jesus – and stood near the courtyard of Caiaphas' home.

Earlier in the evening – in the upper room at the table - Peter had pledged his allegiance Jesus. He had said, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.” But Jesus replied – I tell you Peter, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you know me.”

Of course – we know that Jesus was right.

Peter is standing by the courtyard gate and a servant woman asks him, “Aren't you one of this man's disciples?” And Peter quickly replies, “I'm not”.

At this point the Sanhedrin was assembled in the home of the High Priest – the Sanhedrin was the ruling body of the Jewish people. So when the High Priest Caiaphas was ready to deal with Jesus, the guards would have made him cross his arms into an x – they would have wrapped them with rope- and then pulled him up through a hole in the floor to place him in front of the Sanhedrin.

Peter moves into the courtyard and joins people who were warming themselves by a fire. One of the guards asked him – “Aren't you one of his disciples?” and Peter said, “I'm not.”

And then a servant of the High Priest – a relative of Malchus from earlier in the garden – said to Peter – Didn't I see you in the garden with him? And for the third time – Peter denied knowing Jesus. And immediately a rooster crowed. I like that John leaves it there. When Luke records this story in his Gospel – he tells us that when Peter made his third denial – Jesus – being tried by the Sanhedrin just beyond the courtyard – turned and looked at Peter.

I think that this story still grabs us after 2000 years because it is a story to which we can all relate. It shows us our fragile nature – after all – Peter was the oldest. He was the leader of the disciples. **If he could blow it – we all could blow it.**

Peter was there for every recorded moment in Jesus' ministry. He was called from his boat on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus said, "Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people." Peter walked away from his normal way of life to follow Jesus. He even allowed Jesus to stay with him in Capernaum.

Peter was willing to walk on water. When Peter took his eyes off Jesus for a second and began to sink - "Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him." And not only did Jesus rescue him, but he also taught him a lesson. As He was lifting him up, he asked, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

In Caesarea Philippi - it was Peter who made the amazing and powerful declaration - the Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Peter was also up on the Mount of Transfiguration - he saw Jesus transformed before his very eyes, he saw Moses and Elijah, and he heard the voice of God claim Jesus and tell him to listen to Jesus.

In just this day - he had sat at the table with Jesus. He had prayed with Jesus in the garden. He had tried to defend Jesus with his sword. But now - he had denied following Jesus, denied being a disciple, he had denied even knowing Jesus.

See - we can connect to Peter. We can relate to Peter. In many ways - we are Peter. We have blown it over and over. We have had it and lost. We have put our priorities in order and then shook them up and added in things that simply don't matter.

Christ gave himself for each of us. Christ gave himself for Peter.

Christ didn't just die for perfect people. He didn't simply die for respectable people. He died for us. For people who have made mistakes along the way. He died for sinners like you and like me.

Because when we have blown it - he still loves us. When we have put other things before him - he still loves us. When we have denied him in what we say, how we act - he still loves us. He still loved Peter - he still loves us.

Someone has said that the most beautiful words in the Bible come after Christ's resurrection when the women go to the tomb and find it empty and an angel says to them, "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the

place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you’”.

Isn't it wonderful that Peter is singled out? It's Christ is saying to Peter, "I know your heart. You blew it, but my grace is sufficient for you." And John's Gospel concludes with Jesus calling Peter back to follow him again. Because Jesus knew what Peter was capable of and he expected great things from Simon Peter.

Peter blew it – but then Peter became the leader of the early church.

Peter was mentioned by name 153 times in the New Testament.

He was a complicated man, who did right and who did wrong, who acted and who reacted, but he was a man whom Jesus kept forgiving and kept loving and kept calling.

Peter proves that ordinary people, with all of our faults and issues, are still able to do great things for God's glory.

If we approach our life with the sense of urgency like Jesus approached his life – what changes would you need to make? In what order are your priorities today? The way we know God would want them – or have you shaken them up and mixed in nonessentials pretending they are essential?

Do your actions or reactions – the way you treat each other – the things you say – the things you do – do they reflect your role as a disciple of Jesus – or do they deny even knowing who he is?

The good news for us is that we have Peter as our example – and we know that, like Peter, no matter how badly we might have blown it – Jesus still loves us, he still sees our potential, and his grace is still sufficient.