

18 March 2009  
Lent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Wound of Denial”

Text: Matthew 26:57-75

Not once, not twice, but three times Peter is given the opportunity to confess his Lord. And not once, not twice, but three times, Peter instead denies his Lord. He didn't want to, and didn't think he would, even insisting that he would not! But fear often gets the best of us - all of us.

And chief among the fears that often paralyze and silence us is the fear of death. Maybe for us, unlike Peter, it is not the threat of physical death, but the death of another's respect, or of their friendship, or of being shunned or made fun of, or of not being considered as cool and acceptable as the next guy - of being considered a religious fanatic. And by our silence, we too often deny our Lord. Our silence, which is a denial just as loud as Peter's ***“I don't know the man!”***

Our fear of death - these deaths of all kinds - is how the devil keeps us in bondage. (Heb 2:15) It is how he keeps us down, convincing us that these things are real threats to us and our well-being - so keep your head down and your mouth shut and just try to get along in this world. If you don't . . . well, you just may end up being crucified!

Now that sounds frightening! Until you remember and realize that *we have already been crucified* - crucified with our Saviour in Holy Baptism. (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20) But not only crucified with Him, but then also raised to a new life with Him. So that in Jesus, we might have *nothing* to fear, not even death, and so the bondage of the devil be broken. That in Jesus, we have all that we need to live our lives in this world as His children in confidence and peace.

For as much as we fear death, Jesus hates it. He does not fear it, but despises it and scorns it; He hates what it does to us; and so He came to destroy it. He came into this world to destroy death for us by letting death devour Him, and then crushing its power in His resurrection. And so to death He goes. His life is not taken from Him, He lays it down of His own accord. He stands before high priest and king and governor and makes the good confession we are so often afraid to make. Before Him lurks the cross and an excruciatingly slow and painful death - He knows! But He does not shrink or wilt; He does not fear; He will not leave us or deny us. For us He came, and so for us He will die. His life will be the fragrant offering and sacrifice to His Father, His blood blotting out forever the guilt of our sin and the sin of the whole world. And so Jesus also knows that though world and disciples leave Him, His Father will not abandon Him to the grave. Death's bonds will be burst, and we will be set

free from death and from our fear of death.

Now, Peter had heard all this from Jesus - but when before his eyes he beholds his Master in the hands of those who are beating and mocking and crucifying Him, his heart quails and his faith trembles and fears. Just like we who have heard and yet still fear. And when the rooster crows, Peter goes out and weeps bitterly. He has wounded His Lord with the wound of denial, and he has wounded himself the same. And perhaps you have wept the same over your failures and weakness.

But the Word of God that drives us to tears also comforts us. And so after Peter denies Jesus, and Jesus then looks him in the eye (Luke 22:61-62), it is as if Jesus is saying: *“Remember, I told you that you would deny me, and I was right, so you have. But remember also that I told you I would rise again, and I will be right about that too!”* And so the sin and death you now feel will be swallowed up in victory. My wounds will heal your wounds. Do not despair, but believe!

And Peter did, for now look at Peter on the other side of the resurrection, and on the other side of Pentecost. If there was no greater denier, there was also no greater confessor. The life of Christ and the gift of the Spirit has healed and changed Peter, and it has healed and changed you the same. Your Baptism has given you the life of Christ and the gift of the Spirit and with it the guarantee of a life that will never end. For there is One who is more powerful than death, more powerful than hell, more powerful than sin, and you are His and He is yours. So that when you come face-to-face with death - like Peter would again - you need not fear. Though death will come, it cannot win; it cannot have you. You belong to Him who gave Himself for you.

And so it was with Peter. He who cowered in fear before a servant girl would later stand up to the Roman Emperor and, according to church tradition, be crucified upside down. Christ had set him free and so he could now laugh at death - for though it still lurks and roars and opens its jaws wide to devour us, it can harm us none. We are safe in the ark of our Saviour's body. His body wounded for us, that we might be healed.

And so in the wounds of Christ, we find healing for our wounds of denial - for when we deny in word and deed, or in silence and inaction. In the wounds of Christ, we discover a love that proclaims to us the seriousness of our sin, but the even greater enormity of His life and forgiveness. In the wounds of Christ, we find the balm for the sting of death, and the joy of our victorious substitute. Our substitute who now stands before the Father and confesses you and me, His blood pleading for us, and covering us, and changing us. From deniers to confessors. From fearful to faithful. From sinners to saints.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.