

2 March 2016
Lent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Little (or BIG!) Peter in Each of Us: Misunderstanding”
Text: John 18:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Well Peter wasn't going to make the same mistake again! He wasn't going to be caught sleeping this time. He would keep his word and promises. He would stand by Jesus. He would not shrink back. Yes, he would even die with His Lord - and *for* Him, if necessary. He would prove himself. Now was his hour.

So when he sees *the band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees*, when he sees the *lanterns and torches and weapons*, when he hears that they've come for Jesus and are going to arrest Him, bind Him, and take Him away, Peter draws his sword. He's going to go down fighting. And the first casualty of his flying sword is the right ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant.

Oh Peter! How can you be so misunderstanding? It's not about you, it's about Jesus. This is His hour, not yours. He would prove Himself and His love, not you. He would die for you, not you for Him. You will still shrink back, but He will not. He will stand by you, and He will keep His Word and promises - every single one of them. He is going as it is written of Him. Don't you see that, Peter?

But he doesn't. He should. Look at what had just unfolded before his very eyes. When the crowd of soldiers and officers come up to Him, Jesus cuts them down with just a few words. *I am he*, he says, and *they all draw back and fall to the ground*. Like dominoes knocked down by a giant divine hand, all those big, brave soldiers tumble to the ground. And it could have been worse. The one whose voice commands creation, rules over sicknesses and diseases, and expels demons, could have struck them all down and taken their life. But He does not. That is not what He has come for. He has come to lay down His own life - for Peter, for them, for you. So after they all get up and approach Him again, Jesus withholds His power. He allows Himself to be taken. The Creator places Himself into His creatures' hands.

Don't you see, Peter? Do you still not understand? *Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?* But Peter hadn't heard that. That was the struggle and those were the words he had just slept through.

So what about you and me? Do we understand?

On the one hand we do. We know the story. We know of the crucifixion and the resurrection and how it all turns out in the end.

But what we don't know is the end of our own stories. How it will all turn out for us. Like Peter, sometimes we are faced with frightening situations. We see the powers and forces of this world, and their unholy alliance against Christ and His Church. We know our own past failures and want to do better, prove ourselves, not let our Lord down again. And so we try to be strong and pull our swords and fight for our Lord. That's not necessarily wrong, this side of the cross, as long as we use the right sword - the sword of God's Word.

But isn't that the very sword we so often leave in its sheath? Instead relying on the swords of our own strength, of human wisdom, of political influence, of earthly and worldly power. Those all have their place, but against the evil and darkness in our world, they are not just weak, they are nothing. And we, like Peter, are easily overcome.

Consider again the words we heard from St. Paul tonight: ***God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*** And the most foolish, weakest, lowest, and most despised thing of all is the cross, and Jesus on it. That you must be saved by a crucified criminal. That what looks like shame is really glory. That what looks like death and defeat is really victory and life. That's stupid.

But that Christ is ***the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*** That Christ now places Himself into the hands of those He came to save, and allows them to crucify Him *to do just that*. They crucified a criminal against Rome - that's what could be seen. But Jesus died the death of all us criminals against God - that's what could not be seen. He took it in our place, to - as He said in the garden - ***let these men go***. And because of Him, we have been. *Let go* from the guilt of our sin. *Let go* from the grip of death and the grave. *Let go* from the condemnation of the evil one. That the Word of God be fulfilled. That we have a Saviour.

And so Jesus heals the ear of the servant Peter in his zeal had cut off. That he might hear the Word of God. For faith comes by hearing the Word of God, and understanding by believing what it says - not what we think ought to be. For as we sang: *How firm a foundation, O saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word* (LSB #728 v.1)!

Peter would later understand. He would ***preach Christ crucified***. He would ***boast*** [only] ***in the Lord***. And he would lay down his life for Jesus; he would be martyred. But not to keep his word, but because Jesus had kept His. Not to prove himself faithful to Jesus, but because Jesus was faithful to him. And not because his love was so great, but because

Jesus' is. And so while those who crucified Peter thought they won by so doing, Peter would finally understand that he had already won. For Jesus had won the battle for him.

And for you. So that whatever troubles, whatever powers, whatever fears now come to attack you, you need not fear. You have already won, in Jesus. You are a child of God and under His care even now. And on the Last Day, Jesus will say to the grave ***let this one go*** - and it will. And you will live. For Jesus did drink the cup. He loses none that He is given. And so we rest and we hope and we boast in Him.

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