

5 April 2023
Holy Wednesday Meditation

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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Text: Matthew 26:57-75

In the Name of (+) Jesus. Amen.

Peter wasn't in a garden but in a courtyard, but it might as well have been a garden. For he acted the same as Adam and Eve in the Garden. When he was found out, he denied and tried to hide. But as God came to Adam and Eve and called to them, to bring them out of their sin and into His grace, so too did God call out to Peter, but with Peter, using a rooster. The rooster crow cutting into his heart. The rooster crow exposing his sin and shame. The rooster crow driving him to despair. **And he went out and wept bitterly.**

That's okay. Good even. Weeping and mourning over our sin is exactly what we should do, but often fail to do. Instead, like Peter, we deny. Like Adam and Eve, we blame others. We try to hide it and cover it up. Or when we do repent, how often is it *pro forma*? We say the words, we know them well, but do our hearts and minds come along? Well, that night at least, they did for Peter. He had done what he swore he would never do: he denied his Lord. And not just once or twice - though that would have been enough! - but three times. Each time, a little stronger. Each time, sinking him a little deeper. Until it all came crashing down on him, when the rooster preached and proclaimed his sin.

We need preachers to proclaim our sin to us. Maybe it is a pastor, or a child, or a spouse, or a friend. Maybe we get mad when someone points out our sin, but we need it. It is good. And *it is loving*. That rooster didn't know he was preaching to Peter, he was just doing what he always did. But Jesus used him, in love, for this. And maybe your child or spouse doesn't know they are preaching to you, but your guilty conscience is pricked. What do you do? Lash out or weep bitterly? Deny or repent?

As Christians, we know what we *should* do, because we know what we need. What we don't need is to cover up our sin so that it continues to live in us and fester and grow! We need it out. We need it forgiven. And so after the preaching of the rooster - and the roosters in *our* lives - we need to preaching of Christ and His cross. That yes, you are a wretched sinner, it is true. But Jesus knew that, and knows that. That why He's here in the flesh. That's why He stands before Pilate. That's why He ascends the cross. Not because you're a good person, but because you're not. Because you need forgiveness. You need Him.

So Jesus would not deny who He was. He would not answer the false charges and accusations made against Him - against those, He remained silent. But when He was

asked who He was, He gladly confessed. Because even those who falsely accused Him, those who lied about Him, those who mocked Him, those who condemned Him, needed Him. He was there for them, even if they did not want Him. For maybe one day, they would. And for them, too, there would be forgiveness.

As there was for Peter. How many times did he replay those denials over and over in his mind, wishing he had spoken differently? How long a day was that Saturday, as Jesus lay in the tomb? Until Jesus came to him and the rest of the disciples on Sunday and said to them: *Peace be with you*. Peace, not shame. Peace, not guilt. Peace, not condemnation. Peace, for your sins are forgiven. I do not hold them against you. I died for you, exactly for this. I forgive you.

Those are the words we need to hear, and we do every Sunday. But why wait until Sunday? Repent to one another, and speak forgiveness to one another. Everyday. Point to the cross and say: There is your sin. Jesus took it and died for it. And if Jesus took it and died for it, who am I to take it back and hold it against you? No, you are forgiven.

Imagine if we did that? Think that might change some things? In our families, in our churches, in our lives with others? And if we did, if we lived that way and spoke that way, maybe there would be those who notice, and come up to us and say: *You are with Him, Jesus, aren't you?* Surely you are, for the way you speak betrays you. To which we could then gladly reply: *Yes, I am a Christian*. In a world that is becoming more hostile to Christians and to the truth, that might get you in trouble, maybe even killed. But all the world can do is kill you - they cannot take your life. And yes, those are two very different things. For your life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). Your life is secure in Him. You can live and die in peace.

And though, with Peter, we may weep bitterly now, the time is coming when Jesus *will turn our mourning into dancing* (Psalm 30:11). And that time will be coming. Soon. When the one who died for us and rose for us will come again for us. And we will know Him and confess Him. But even better, He will know and confess us! He will know us as His children, and say: *Peace be with you! Welcome home!*

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