

“The Courtyard: A Place of Renewal” – Luke 22:54-62

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Have you ever been caught by surprise in a store? Your son’s car won’t start, so you drive him to an early morning football practice. You haven’t had time to shower or put on anything decent. On the way home, you stop by the store to grab a few things and then comes the voice. Someone calls out your name. Normally, you like meeting people . . . but not today. Today, you want to run and hide. Why? Because all of a sudden you see yourself and you think “Do I really look like this, out in a public place?” It’s a moment of self-revelation.

Tonight, we have a moment of self-discovery for Peter. Peter sees who he is in terms of his denial. But, by God’s grace, Jesus also holds out another picture for us. A picture of who Jesus is for Peter: his Savior. This evening, we will meditate on these two pictures—Peter’s denial and Peter’s Savior. Doing that, it is my prayer that we will grow in trust of our Savior, who enters places of denial and turns them into places of renewal in His love.

Consider the courtyard. The place of Peter’s denial. As we listen to the conversation that occurs in the courtyard, we see more and more of Peter’s life stripped away. It’s kind of like watching a crack in the foundation slowly spread, bringing the whole house to ruin. The servant girl is the first to reveal the problem. She mentions the relationship between Peter and Jesus. “This man also was with Him,” she says (Luke 22:56). She puts Peter and Jesus together with these words. But Peter denies it. “I do not know Him,” he says. A crack in the foundation. He denies his Lord. And when your relationship with Jesus is broken, it doesn’t take long for everything else to give. From there, we move to Peter’s relationship with Jesus and the disciples. Someone says, “You are also one of *them*” (22:58). So, we have Peter and Jesus and then Peter and the disciples. Finally, someone offers the bigger picture. He says, “Certainly, this fellow was with Him, for he too is a Galilean” (22:59). We move from Peter and Jesus to Peter and the disciples to Peter and all of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee. And Peter still says “No.” When your relationship with Jesus is broken, it doesn’t take long for everything else to give.

At this moment, Peter has a moment of painful self-revelation. He hears a sound, sees a face, and remembers a word. Luke writes, “Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And

the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord” (22:60–61). Like hearing your name called in a store, Peter at this point remembers and sees. He remembers what Jesus said. Jesus knew him better than he knew himself. Peter said he would follow Jesus to prison. He’d follow Him to death. But instead, he denied he ever knew Jesus. This is a moment of spiritual self-revelation. By our own might, we are unable to follow Jesus. Salvation is not dependent on what we do for Jesus. It never has been, and it never will be. And, if we ever rely on our own strength rather than Jesus, we’ve entered into a place of denial.

That is what really makes a place of denial. Not the drama of having other people question you about Jesus but the simple nature of your relationship to Him. Whenever we rely on our own strength instead of Jesus, we’ve entered into a place of denial. Think about our places of denial. They are not as dramatic as Peter’s. But they are places of denial, nonetheless. It could be a place of honor in the church. We are founding members of the congregation. It could be a place of great leadership, as we’ve done much to further the kingdom of God. It could be the frequency and fervor of our devotional life. We look at these things: our years of membership, our leadership, our attendance in a congregation, our time spent in Bible study and prayer, and we slowly begin to think that we are strong in the faith because of our own doing. We become a bit bolder in our witness. We speak out at work, sharing our disgust with our culture’s sinful lifestyle. We speak up at church meetings. After all, people should listen to us; we’ve been members around here for years. And, as we think we are growing stronger and stronger in the faith, we actually are neglecting the crack in the foundation. There are many ways of denial, you see. You can deny Jesus by saying you never knew Him—clearly, emphatically, right in the middle of a courtyard—or you can deny Jesus by saying you know Him, loudly, emphatically, self-righteously, but all the while forgetting His work in your life. You look like a Christian. You act like a Christian. You do all of the things that a Christian does. But there is a crack in the foundation. You’re relying on your own power, your own achievements, and there is a crack between you and Jesus. And soon, the whole structure will fall.

There will come a time when we have not been able to do as we had hoped, when we tell our child that “Christians don’t do that,” and he says, “But, Dad, you do it all the time.” When we sign the divorce papers and our spouse says, “But I thought you said, ‘I do.’” When we see that we cannot follow into prison or give our lives unto death, that we are weak, and we are sinful, and there is no health in us, and, for a despairing moment, all we can say is “We are lost in sin and cannot set ourselves free.”

To such people, Luke offers another word this evening. The word of Jesus. The story of His Passion. In the midst of our failure, Jesus is and remains the one who takes away our sin. Our salvation does not depend on how much we can bear for Jesus. Instead, it depends on what Jesus bears for us. Our forgiveness does not depend on what we do or say for Jesus. It rests securely on what Jesus does and says for us. In the face of Peter's denial as His disciple, Jesus continues to be his Lord. While Peter goes out to weep bitterly, Jesus goes on to suffer for this man that is weeping. It is His work, His love, His mercy that overcomes our sin. Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself. And Jesus knows you better than you know yourself. He sees this denial and our sin, and yet He continues to go to the cross. We are not saved by giving our lives up for Jesus; Jesus saves us by giving up His life for the forgiveness of our sin. That's what Luke reveals to us this evening. When Peter is caught in the act of denial, Jesus continues in His act of love.

By doing this, Luke asks us to see a different picture. The picture of a Savior's love. Jesus comes to us in the most awkward of moments. He does not wait until we get it all together to visit our homes. He does not wait until we have overcome our temptations and fought our demons and conquered our sins and achieved our goals. No. He comes now, while we struggle. Now, while we confess our failure. Now, while we feel like we'll never be the person God wants us to be. He comes now to assure us that "by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus is the foundation of our life before God. God the Father received His life for your life that He might give you His love for all time.

Jesus comes to you tonight with a love that never changes. Time passes and our life is filled with change. We move from a dorm to an apartment, from an apartment to a house, from a house to a condo, from a condo to a retirement center, from a retirement center to a skilled care facility, from the skilled care facility to our grave, and from our grave we will be raised to live in our Savior's kingdom. In each place, however, Jesus remains the same. He is the one who forgives our sins and saves our souls. Even at the end, after death and the grave, we will be raised to find Him as we have always known Him to be. The one who went to the cross to die for our sin and rose from the grave for our salvation. Jesus brings us tonight a picture of His love. In those times when you are faced with a painful self-revelation, Luke wants you to see your Savior. Trust in His love, live in His kingdom, pray in His name, and know that as you now know Him, He ever will be. Jesus enters our places of denial and makes them places of renewal in His love. Amen.