

Peter's Pride and Despair

Luke 22:45-62, Reminiscere Sunday (Lent II)

February 24, 2013

Beloved of the Lord.....Today's lesson is about pride and despair, and Jesus who has forgiveness for all our pride and despair. Too often, and most often throughout life, we suffer greatly from pride as Peter and the disciples. But there are also times when the magnitude of our sins hits us like a great rock bolder and like Peter who denied Christ, we despair and go out and weep bitterly. Though our sins are great and we are in no wise different from Judas who coveted or Peter who feared, our humble Jesus made all these sins His own upon the cross and by His stripes we are healed. Luther said regarding all of this, "A man should certainly be on guard against sin; but if he has fallen, he should not lost heart because of his fall. For God has forbidden both despair and presumption....Toward the righte we should not presume, toward the left we should not despair. Remain on th straight highway: a sinner should nto lose confidence in the mercy of God; a just person should not be proud." *What Luther Says, #961* Though all saints despair at some point in life, those who merely die in the faith of the Lord Jesus, live forever in the glories of heaven even now. "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise".

Our lesson takes place Thursday night when Jesus and His disciples are in the Garden of Gethsemane. As Adam and Eve yielded to temptation in that first garden, now for our salvation God permitted the devil to harass and vex Christ without restraint in the Garden of Gethsemane. Christ had to be tempted in every possible way and also overcome, so we His children never be tempted in a way more than we can bear. As our High Priest Jesus was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." As Jesus said, "Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

We might wonder after Jesus said this, did the disciples obey and pray God would help them be faithful that night? Also how often do we pray that God will help and keep us from temptation? By their behavior it certainly seems the disciples did not boldly go in prayer to the throne of God's grace to find strength to help in time of need. Naturally by this time Judas Iscariot is even now found on the other side, approaching Jesus in the darkness with a band of soldiers. He fell from grace by way of coveting a mere 30 pieces of silver, and unlike Peter, Judas did not return and trust in Christ for forgiveness. When we consider the other ten disciples, we should realize by way of sin they too betrayed Christ that night. After the betrayal of Judas with a kiss, after Peter's sinful outburst with the sword, Matthew writes, "Then ALL the disciples forsook him, and fled." Every single disciple that night, even John who loved the Lord most, yielded to the devil's temptation,

running away in fear. When we are tempted to deny Christ out of fear, let us remember God's command and promise to Jeremiah

"Be not afraid of their faces: for I *am* with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD."

This fearlessness however needs to be couple with humility, for God alone is our strength. In the height of our folly we dare not think ourselves a pillar of strength, lest in the hour of trial we be nothing more than a bowl full of wobbly Jello at a church potluck. Therefore "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Only the grace of Christ can uphold us in such an hour and it is certain we cannot uphold ourselves. Thus consider the words of John the Baptist who said, "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low." When God brings low every mountain or hill, He is bulldozing level to the ground our swollen pride. I would assume many or most of us have been severely humbled at various times in life. This is agonizing and painful, very embarrassing. It might be the loss of a job, the loss of a house, a broken engagement, a divorce, a rejection by a dear friend,.... but the more public our sin, the more we want to hide and bury our head in the sand. When God humbles us, everyone sees and knows what we have done, and our sin suddenly becomes open in the eyes of men. This hurts our pride deeply. Sad to say, some people do not repent of their pride and they stay angry with God all their life.

When God humbles us however, we should really learn to be very thankful for what He has done, for "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." Though it hurts.... God is performing a good work upon us, just as great as healing leprosy or taking away blindness. By the chastening of the Lord, God keeps our pride in check so it does not overthrow our faith and we perish in unbelief. When humbled, we learn better what sinful and proud fools we are and we see more perfectly our humble Christ, who desired our salvation so greatly He humbly suffered for our sinful pride upon the cross. God empties us of pride only so "every valley shall be filled" with His grace and mercy. Thus it was not God's will that the disciples forsake Jesus, but since they were proud God let them. Likewise it was not God's will that Peter deny Christ three times, but since Peter was proud God let him. They had to die in this high opinion of themselves, so they might live only in Jesus. When God thus allows us to fall into foolish sins which hurt us, IT IS ONLY SO HIS GRACE WILL LIFT US UP. Psalm 147:6 says, "The LORD lifteth up the meek." God is the Potter and we are the clay. By this good but bitter medicine, God will mold and form us into something better, a better vessel more fit for His glory. When you thus find you have fallen into a grievous sin, don't discount or make excuses for the great evil you have done, but acknowledge it, confess it, for "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

Looking now more perfectly upon Peter, after abandoning Christ both Peter and John "followed afar off."

They stayed in the shadows a certain distance from the band of soldiers, but close enough to know Jesus was taken to the house of the High Priest. John knows this household and goes in first, and it is he who causes the maid to let Peter in shortly thereafter. Why was Peter there? No doubt he felt very guilty. He knew well how he had so loudly confessed he would never deny Christ. By Peter going to the very place where Jesus was, with all its guards and soldiers, Peter may have been convincing his conscience that he was still bold and faithful. This is comparable to Judas who tried to return the 30 pieces of silver that night. The price of our sin however is much greater. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." Simply put, we cannot undo nor rectify our sins of betrayal or denial. If we deny Christ three times, confessing Christ three times cannot buy forgiveness, nor can 30 pieces of silver returned.

As Peter now sits by a fire warming himself, a maid earnestly studies his face. She recognizes him and publicly says in front of others "this man was also with Him." Being filled with fear, Peter quickly denies the first time. In doing so he breaks the eighth commandment which says "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." Not long after this a man makes the same charge against Peter. Peter denies again and answers, "Man, I am not." Fearing man more than God Peter's soul is in now in turmoil. After this a whole hour passes and because Peter has a Galilean accent another man says, "Of a truth this fellow also was with Him: for he is a Galilean". In his third denial Peter answers, "Man I know not what thou sayest". Peter now "began to curse and to swear" "and immediately the cock crew." By swearing here, Peter was making a public oath that if he knew Christ, may God punishing him now and into all eternity for such a lie! Peter damned his own soul by such words.

It was just after the second crow of the rooster, Jesus now comes into view, being transferred from the room of Annas (Trial #1) to Caiaphas (Trial #2). Knowing all things, the Lord "turned and looked upon Peter". Their eyes meet and Peter remembers God's Word, "Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." With horror Peter's faith in himself is finally broken. He rushes away from the scene of the crime into the darkness of night. "Peter went out and wept bitterly."

While it appears Peter despaired for a time, it is also certain Peter returned or went back in faith to the Lord Jesus for forgiveness. While the time of his reconversion is not so important, it is of the greatest importance we see Jesus has forgiveness for such great sins as this threefold denial. This lesson is not just about pride or denial, but what should be emphasized here is no matter how far we have fallen short of the glory of God, God's grace can restore and lift us up. Peter denied Christ. David committed adultery. Moses struck the rock. Christ disciples ran. Noah got drunk. Paul persecuted Christians and Thomas doubted. Luther thus writes, "These examples are very necessary for the Church. For where should we stay? What hope would remain for us if Peter had not denied Christ and if all the apostles had not been offended at Him and if Moses, Aaron, and David had

not fallen? Therefore God wanted to comfort sinners with these examples and say 'If you have fallen, return; the door of mercy stands open to you.'" Thus if God can receive such horrible sinners as David and Peter and those fearful disciples, won't God receive you also, even if you have fallen? Jesus sinners doth receive, and "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."

Thus while God does not want us to be proud and presumptuous as Peter, let us learn here also God does not want us to despair. His blood still covers and atones for ALL OUR SINS, EVEN if we have fallen. God forgives unbelief just as much as He forgives pride because "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" for "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

When we thus hit rock bottom, and we go out and weep bitterly over our sins as Peter, it is like we are in the bottom of a deep pit. We look to the left, we look to the right and we look down, and there is only darkness. In the midst of such despair however, we need to look up to heaven, looking up to Christ who is called the "Light of the world." When you are afraid of God's wrath then, and you feel as though any moment He will turn on you, stop "feeling" for forgiveness, and have FAITH in the many WORDS OF GOD which declare you forgiven. What does it mean to your soul, when Jesus in the Word declares, "Son be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee!" Why does Jesus speak this way, if not to forgive and assure your heart of His mercy? And still yet, if you are not sure if God will forgive you, then why is the Bible filled from one end to another with passages like, Isaiah 1:128, "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Likewise if you are yet tempted to believe you must do something to earn heaven, why then does God say in Romans 4, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Needless to say, for God has said it, God's salvation through Christ is free. Therefore dear brothers and sisters in Christ, while it is true only believers in Christ go to heaven when they die, God's Word gives you every reason to believe and look up to the heavens in hope. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Jesus forgives your pride, your despair, your betrayal, and even your unbelief, therefore "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Amen.