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March 31, 2019

Mark 14:66-72

Good News: From mistakes we learn

<sup>66</sup>Meanwhile, Peter was below in the courtyard. A woman, one of the high priest's servants, approached <sup>67</sup>and saw Peter warming himself by the fire. She stared at him and said, "You were also with the Nazarene, Jesus."

<sup>68</sup>But he denied it, saying, "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't understand what you're saying." And he went outside into the outer courtyard. A rooster crowed.

<sup>69</sup>The female servant saw him and began a second time to say to those standing around, "This man is one of them." <sup>70</sup>But he denied it again.

A short time later, those standing around again said to Peter, "You must be one of them, because you are also a Galilean."

<sup>71</sup>But he cursed and swore, "I don't know this man you're talking about." <sup>72</sup>At that very moment, a rooster crowed a second time. Peter remembered what Jesus told him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down, sobbing.

How many of you have been awakened by the rooster crowing? Is there anybody here who still wakes up with the rooster? I can remember very well the times during the summer when I would stay at my grandmother's house. There were lots of animals and, of course, the rooster. I was not very happy about waking up to the sound an early rooster voice. I think there are only a few who like to be wakened up from a deep sleep.

Several times Isaiah cries out, "Wake up, O sleeper."

Today the rooster is crowing and waking us up from sleep. It is calling us to wake up from spiritual sleep. We are in the season of Lent. It is a time to examine, to confess and be awakened to God's Spirit and His presence. May we each hear these word from the Gospel of Mark and arouse ourselves to live as faithful disciples.

Peter loved Jesus. He was sincere in trying to be a follower of Christ. I love the Scriptures because it tells so much of real life. It portrays the life of real people without glossing over their mistakes, failures or sins. The pictures of the heroes are not sanitized from their foibles.

Noah got drunk and embarrassed his family. Both Abraham and Isaac, out of fear, lied about their wives and God had to intervene. Jacob's name means deceiver which he proved to be. Moses disobeyed God and, as a result, did not enter the Promised Land. We all know about David and Bathsheba. The list goes on and on.

At the same time the Bible tells us about God's grace which enables us to sing, "O how wonderful, O how marvelous, is my savior's love for me."

Today we look at another hero, Peter. Peter: the man who walked with Jesus on the water. Peter: the first person to identify Jesus as the Christ. Peter: previously known as Simon and had his name changed by Jesus to Peter which means rock. Peter: the man who was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Peter: the first one brave enough to walk into the empty tomb. Peter: the man who stood up to preach on Pentecost and 3,000 joined the church. Peter: the man who healed the lame man.

Today's lesson was not one of our hero's finer moments. I think that Peter did not just suddenly fall into being a huge failure. I think there was a slow leaking, dripping and making little mistakes. He was unable to hear what Jesus was telling them.

Jesus said to them: "You will all fall away."

Peter was insulted. "Even if everyone else stumbles, I won't. If I must die alongside you, I won't deny you". Peter was sure in himself and his action in the future. He was full of himself and he was good and brave. It sounds to me like he is boasting.

Probably most of you do not remember, but I do. I think it was about two months ago, I said during my sermon that I am good at meeting deadlines. I came to regret that statement and felt so bad that it took me days to recover and forgive myself for bragging.

You all know the saying and probably have said it more than once: "Pride comes before the fall."

That week I missed three deadlines.

I am grateful that God is teaching me. When I realized I missed those deadlines it was like a rooster's voice to me. Do not boast in your flesh. You never know what you will face and what your reaction will be. Things change in life and we do too. It is much better to boast in Jesus and what He has done and is doing in your life. It is much better to say: "If God is willing, I plan on, by God's strength."

Let us continue to humble ourselves. It is easy to be proud of our good works and to even boast about what we have done or are doing. Instead, let us have the attitude of servanthood: we are merely doing our assignment. Boast only in what God is doing. May our prayer today, and always, be: "Without you, God, I cannot do anything."

In the same chapter a few verses later, Jesus is praying. He took Peter, James and John and asked them to pray with him. Jesus came and found them asleep. He said to Peter: "Simon, Are you asleep? Couldn't you stay alert for one hour?"

Why do you need to pray? When you are tired you go to sleep. We get too tired to pray. We do not like to get up to pray. We push the snooze button on the alarm clock and rush because we are late to work. We pray way too little. We, including me, do not fully realize the importance and the difference between when we pray and we do not.

Martin Luther said, "I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer."

Why do you need to pray before work? You can manage pretty good on your own. You are smart. Why do you need to pray before meetings? You can handle everything pretty well. Why pray every day? You get it. I can be a good mom, a good wife, daughter... If you are a good speaker, you do not need to depend on the strength and guidance from God.

It was too much for Peter to stay alert for an hour. We all can relate to that. Take me to the football game. I will be bored. I will be watching it trying to be excited. I can see others being super excited. But me, I watch the game clock. You might even be watching the clock now wondering how long I will talk. Some of you might even be praying for the sermon to end.

How many of you will get excited about a prayer meeting with no teaching, no great speaker, no great questions and no food? How many of you will say, "I can't wait to come and pray for an hour?" Praying is hard.

What if we viewed prayer to be like meeting with your best friend? In prayer you are meeting with the One who loves you. Prayer then becomes the sweetest time you have during the day?

Peter boasted too much and prayed too little.

Peter was capable of being brave.

In verse 43: "Suddenly, while Jesus was still speaking, Judas, One of Twelve, came with a crowd carrying swords and clubs" Judas kissed Jesus and they arrested him. What does Peter do?

In Mark's gospel we read: "the bystander" but in John's gospel we find that it was Peter. Peter, took a sword and struck the high priest's slave and cut off his ear. I have to chuckle a little bit when I read this. We all know that Peter was a fisherman. I do not think he was good with a sword. I think it was not his intention to cut off the ear.

Roman soldiers were required by law to practice a minimum of an hour a day, taking out a sword, pivoting, and bringing the weapon over their heads so they could get full leverage coming down. The helmets were welded right down the middle, so if you could hit the weld with enough force and accuracy, you could split the helmet, obviously

disposing of the victim. I think that's what Peter wanted to accomplish. But it did not work this way.

If we are boasting, could it be a sign that we have not been in prayer enough? This, in turn, leaves us acting in ways that are not helpful or needed at all.

"And all his disciples left him and ran away" but Peter follows Jesus to the courtyard. He is trying to be faithful but he does not want to be recognized or known.

There was a woman, the high priest's servant. She stared at him and said:" You were also with the Nazarene, Jesus. Peter denied it: "I do not know what you are talking about. I do not understand what are you saying". I know this phrase very well from my own household. "I do not know what you are talking about". Seriously... You know very well what I am talking about. Just playing dumb thinking that will save you. Peter acts like he doesn't know what she's talking about.

The rooster crowed but it did not awaken Peter yet. The same persistent woman kept staring and kept talking. Nothing is more annoying than a persistent woman.

For the second time Peter denied that he was with Jesus. I think Peter realized how bad he would look and how embarrassed he would feel if he told the truth. Was it fear that snared Peter? Maybe it was pride.

I will not forget when I was about 19 years old. I was tutoring the daughter of missionaries. I would go together with her to the Lithuanian school so I could help her understand and adjust to Lithuanian school. It was a history class. The teacher talked about religion. She asked how many were Catholics, how many Lutherans. Then the teacher asked: Any other religion? I was so embarrassed when this girl, this missionary daughter raised her hand and said that she is Methodist. You would not do it if you were local and understand the culture. You will be ridiculed. You will be an outsider. This could change her life forever. Kids can be cruel and will not let that slide. I tried to help that girl to adjust and fit in the culture. But what was I doing? I was ashamed of how I would look in the eyes of others.

How many times have I stayed quiet so I can play cool?

How many times do you and I not share about our faith in God, even with our friends? It is much easier to just talk about anything else. We want to look acceptable. We avoid sharing the gospel. We think of a lot of good excuses...

I have not forgotten my lesson since that time the Spirit in me gave me a wakeup call. A rooster crowed. This girl, her hand raised up high, her being proud that she is Methodist gave me courage to share my faith and my call to proclaim the gospel in all places. Because of her I was able to not hide but to say I am a pastor in Lithuania. 99% of the time I would get a look. At my time of pastoring, to my knowledge, there were only two woman pastors in all of Lithuania. So, of course, I stuck out like a sore thumb.

The third time Peter not only denied that he was with Jesus, he denied he even knew Him. Our words sometimes deny what we believe and who we truly are. I am learning not to argue when I am hurt or angry. I do not even want to discuss the matter because it is too painful and the conversation can get very ugly very quickly.

The rooster crowed again. This time Peter remembered Jesus' words and woke up from what he had done. Peter "broke down, sobbing". We all mess up, but not all of us hear the rooster. Not all are able to confess. How many times do I treat my sin like secret lover? I know it is not good. I know I should not have it. I know I should hide it but it is so sweet to my nature, to my flesh, that I keep it secretly. Some of us do not even hide it,

Let us hear today the wakeup call. Let us run away from sin and pursue holiness. Let us remember how Jesus died on the cross proving the Father's forgiveness, love, grace and power. God not only forgave Peter but made Him a rock. Peter received the forgiveness and became the great apostle and evangelist. It is much sweeter to serve God and have our hearts filled with that which satisfies and brings us peace and joy. Not only for a moment but for eternity.