

## The Lord Gives Second Chances

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Then Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’”<sup>32</sup> But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”<sup>33</sup> Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.”<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”<sup>35</sup> Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.” (Matthew 26:31-35)

### 1. Israel’s Promise

During our trip to Israel, I asked a rabbi what they do on the Sabbath. He said they don’t use electricity, telephone, computer and the internet. Can you imagine living a whole weekend without using any electricity or communication with the outside world? I am not sure whether I can survive without them. But they gather Friday night and Saturday morning at the synagogue to rejoice and celebrate and spend most of Saturday afternoon learning about the Torah.

The Sabbath is something many Jewish families look forward to. It is a reminder of God’s gift as his chosen people. People stop working and remember to be still. Why do the Jewish people still keep the Sabbath thousands of years later? According to the Book of Exodus, the reason is because Israel promised to keep God’s commandments. Exodus 19:8 says, **“The people all answered as one: “Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.”** As part of God’s covenant, the people of Israel promised to obey God’s laws. Although I am saddened that they do not believe in Jesus as their savior, I respect their faithfulness to keeping the promise. We do know that keeping our promises to the Lord is not easy at all.

### 2. Peter’s Promise

Today’s scripture tells us Simon Peter’s case. As Jesus and his disciples head for the Mount of Olives after the last supper, Jesus says to his disciples, **“You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’** (Matt. 26:31).

Jesus announces earlier at the Last Supper that one of the disciples will betray him (verse 21). The disciples are shocked. Jesus then tells his disciples that he will be arrested and crucified and that his disciples will scatter when that happens. He reminds them of the prophecy in Zechariah 13:7.

Peter says, “**Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you**” (verse 33). And all the other disciples say the same. Peter and the disciples insist that they will never abandon Jesus. Jesus says to Peter, “**Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times**” (verse 34). Peter promises Jesus, “**Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.**” (verses 35). Peter says that he will never betray his teacher. But Jesus knows that Peter will soon deny him three times.

One day the Holy Land Pilgrims visited the Church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu in Jerusalem. It is a Roman Catholic church on the eastern slope of Mount Zion, outside the Old City of Jerusalem. The church’s name is from the Latin word “Gallicantu,” meaning cock’s-crow. This church is built to remember Peter’s denial (Mark 14:30). There is a statute of the event in the courtyard that includes a rooster, a woman, and a Roman soldier. The statute includes an inscription: “**Woman, I do not know him**” taken from Luke 22:57. This is the place that is believed to be the location of the High Priest Caiaphas’ palace and where Jesus would have been detained for the night following his arrest.

### **3. The Meaning of Peter’s Denial**

Do you know Peter’s denial story is found in all four gospels? Why is the passage of Simon Peter’s denial such a well-remembered story of the Bible? Adam Hamilton, in his book “Simon Peter,” says that “Peter himself insisted on telling it over and over again” (page 104). As people, we try to minimize the failures and shortcomings and maximize the positive stories. In Peter’s case, his story is marked by shame and betrayal. And yet Peter would retell this story time and time again to the early church.

Peter and the Gospel writers probably did this to remind them and us to see ourselves in the Bible passage. When Peter denies Jesus three times, we are reminded that we all also have times where we deny Jesus in “our thoughts, or words or our deeds” (Adam Hamilton).

As a pastor, I often ask myself of how well I am following after Jesus. I am not sure whether I can say that I am a Christian, a disciple of Jesus Christ, and a pastor of the United Methodist Church. I ask myself quite often. Am I doing my ministry for myself or am I truly serving God and

God's people? When I ask these questions, I realize that I have lots of flaw. I feel ashamed of myself and wish to hide myself from the Lord and his people. Yet every Sunday when our service is over, I realize that God does not give up on me yet and keeps using me for His kingdom. God keeps forgiving my shortcomings and betrayals. The Lord is so patient and waits for me to be a more faithful disciple of Jesus. I realize that the Lord keeps giving me second chances. I am reminded of Peter's question about forgiveness.

In Matthew 18:21 & 22, Peter asks Jesus, "**Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?**" Jesus answers, "**I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.**" We know that Jesus doesn't mean 490 times, but that we should continue to forgive others. When Jesus visits Simon Peter and other disciples at the Sea of Tiberias after his resurrection, Peter understands what Jesus meant by forgiving seventy-seven times.

#### **4. The Lord's Forgiveness and Prayer**

In today's scripture, after Jesus says to Peter of his betrayal, Jesus says, "**after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee**" (verse 32). Jesus tells the disciples of his resurrection and his return to Galilee. Jesus knew his disciples would betray him but tells them that he won't forsake them but instead forgive them and still accept them as his disciples after his resurrection.

In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus says to Peter, "**Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.**" Jesus tells Simon Peter that he has prayed for him, and would continue to use him as his disciple.

#### **5. The Lord of Second Chances**

The Bible reminds us that our Lord keeps forgiving and lifting us up with a second chance. Micah 7:19 says, "**He (God) will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.**" Micah reminds us that God's renewal of his favor and love for us is constant when we come to Him in repentance. God has compassion for us and forgives our sins when we reach to him.

#### **6. Conclusion**

How would you answer these questions? “Does God ever give us a second chance, even if we've really messed up our lives? Or Does God ever give up on us?” The Bible tells us that God never gives up on us. Although we all have limits, we are reminded today that God’s love doesn’t have the limits. And when we experience God’s love, we are able to love others as Christ loved us.

In Israel, we had the opportunity to see people praying at the Western Wall, asking God for sending them the Messiah. Do you know how long the Jews have been praying for that purpose? They have been praying for at least the past 2,500 years. While we know that the Messiah has already come, we can see that God’s love for us can span thousands of years. How much more does the love of God extend beyond our expectations? I am sure that you know the answer.

## **7. Application**

This morning, I’m so happy to have the Rev. George Moore from Harrisonville, MO worshipping the Lord with us. I served with George as an associate at Grandview UMC in Missouri many years ago. Our family moved to Connecticut from Missouri in 1990 to study in graduate school. Even though we don’t get to see each other face to face very often, George has continued to show God’s love to our family through his thoughtful birthday cards every year for the past 29 years. But I forgot his birthday many times. He has kept forgiving me and given me many second chances. George will be 90 this July and has been a mentor and example of God’s unfailing love and constant grace. He is a living Christ to me. I give thanks to the Lord that I have experienced God’s love and grace through him.

The story of Peter’s denial tells us that when we may fail the Lord, the Lord never fails us and remains constant in his never-ending love. He will keep giving us another chance to love him and his people. Praise the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.