

TRUTH SCORNE
Sermon for the 3rd Sunday in Lent, 2019
Luke 22:54-71

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 22:54-71: ⁵⁴ **They arrested Him, led Him away, and took Him into the chief priest's house. However, Peter followed at a distance.** ⁵⁵ **When the men had lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard, and had sat down together, Peter sat down among them.** ⁵⁶ **A certain servant girl saw him sitting at the light. She looked at him closely, and said, "This man was also with Him."**

⁵⁷ **However, he denied it, saying, "I do not know Him, woman."**

⁵⁸ **After a little while another man saw him and said, "You are also one of them."**
However, Peter said, "Man, I am not."

⁵⁹ **Then after about an hour had passed, another man began to assert: "It is certain that this man also was with Him. For, indeed, he is a Galilean."**

⁶⁰ **Peter replied, "Man, I do not know what you are saying."**

Just then, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. ⁶¹ **Then the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter, and Peter remembered the Word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times."**

⁶² **Then he went outside and wept bitterly.**

⁶³ **The men who were holding Jesus in custody were making fun of Him as they struck Him.** ⁶⁴ **They covered His face and kept asking Him: "Prophecy! Who hit You?"**

⁶⁵ **They went on insulting Him in many other ways.**

⁶⁶ **In the morning, the council of elders of the people, including the chief priests and the scribes, held a meeting. They brought Jesus before their council and asked,** ⁶⁷ **"Are You the Christ? Tell us!"**

He replied to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe Me. ⁶⁸ **If I ask you a question, you will not answer.**

⁶⁹ **However, from now on the Son of Man will be sitting at the right hand of the power of God."**

⁷⁰ **All of them asked, "Are You, then, the Son of God?"**

He answered them, "As you say: I am He."

⁷¹ **They asked, "Why do we need any more testimony? We ourselves have heard Him say it."**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

As we continue to follow the suffering Lord through the scenes of His Passion, everything that we hear and everything that we see reveals to us both our sin and the love that has redeemed us from sin. We take all that to heart, confessing our sins, and gratefully confessing our faith in that redeeming love.

Last Sunday's sermon text¹ laid bare the roots of sin as we had a glimpse of the dreadful power of darkness. We saw the disciples sleeping, the betrayal of Judas, and the brutality of the Jews. In our text for today, Luke traces the further development of that sin. Humanity's guilt reaches its climax in the *rejection and crucifixion of the Saviour*.

There is no greater crime than this. In the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus, we recognise *every form of sin*. Whatever may be our particular and perhaps pet weakness, we see it in the history of the Passion. So rather than shrinking away from the painful disclosure, seeing ourselves, we make haste to correct whatever may be wrong. The tragic events in our text today may be summed up in two words: Truth Scorned.

First of all, it was Peter who scorned the truth when he *denied his Lord*.

Jesus was arrested, led away, and taken to **the chief priest's house**. Caiaphas was the high priest that year, but his father-in-law, Annas, who formerly had been high priest, continued to exert strong influence and took a hand in the interrogation of Jesus.² Before the council, Jesus made a good confession of faith, declaring that He was the Son of

¹ Luke 22:39-53

² John 18:12-13

God. For this, He was condemned to death, but outside, among those who had gathered, Peter failed to confess Him.

When Jesus was with His disciples in the upper room, on the night of His betrayal, Peter had declared that he was ready to go to prison and even to die with Jesus.³ He had shown his willingness to defend Jesus with a sword, and at the same time did not consider the power of the devil, which would cause him to fall into the trap of denying his Lord *three times*.

So, we see that as Peter sits by **a fire in the middle of the courtyard** of the high priest's house, he is recognised by a **certain servant girl** who insists: **"This man was also with Him."** Peter makes his first denial: **"I do not know Him, woman."** Then, ⁵⁸ **after a little while another man saw him and said, "You are also one of them."**

However, Peter said, "Man, I am not."

⁵⁹ **Then after about an hour had passed, another man began to assert: "It is certain that this man also was with Him. For, indeed, he is a Galilean."**

⁶⁰ **Peter replied, "Man, I do not know what you are saying."**

This was the same disciple who had previously confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, on whose confession Jesus would build His church.⁴ This is the same disciple whom Jesus had chosen to be with Him when He raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead,⁵ when on the Mount of Transfiguration His face had shone like the sun,⁶ when in Gethsemane He so fearfully agonised.⁷ Jesus had given him special revelations; God the Father had enabled him to see more than others; and yet it was he who denied his Lord. Peter had refused to believe Christ's prediction of this denial.

He felt so sure of himself. He would go into death with Jesus. How could he deny Him? Sadly, that rash boast was the first step toward the denial: it was born of self-confidence. Peter truly believed he would be strong enough to confess Christ under any circumstance. That initial mistake was the origin of the denial.

The second step followed logically. Being so sure of himself, Peter disregarded all the warnings from Jesus. Nothing that Jesus said could break down his self-assurance. Then came the third step: deliberate playing with fire. Peter had no business in that courtyard. Jesus had commanded him to watch and to pray that he did not fall into temptation.⁸ Yet foolishly he marched *into* the very jaws of temptation. He was strong. Let them come and take him; he would show them how bravely he would die for his Lord. Not once did he dream that the comments of a servant girl and a couple of men would be the cause of his fall. The temptation assumed an unexpected form - he was caught unprepared, and so denied the truth he had confessed.

This story is not recorded to show up Peter. It is recorded to show up you and me. We have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. We have confessed our faith at our confirmation and often since then. Yet while we admit that we *cannot by our own reason and strength believe in Jesus Christ*, we cannot altogether subdue the thought that, after all, we must be better than others. We want just a little bit of credit for ourselves, and that is the beginning. We feel so strong, perhaps even *invincible*, and in our imagination, we see ourselves in all kinds of desperate situations where just like Luther we stand before a great host and unshrinkingly make known our faith. Then the temptation comes, and it is not that kind of temptation at all. Perhaps it is the laughter of someone poking fun at us. Perhaps it is a pain of some sickness. Perhaps it is this, and perhaps it is that. Who knows? One thing, however, we may be quite sure that it is often rarely what we expect, and even though we know the Lord and believe in Him and feel so sure that we love Him, yet in that dreadful moment we deny Him; we scorn the truth that we have recognised. I doubt whether any of us can dare to despise Peter. Rather, we all need to beat our breast and pray: *"God be merciful to me, a sinner,"* (Luke 18:13).

The truth was also scorned when the **men who were holding Jesus in custody were making fun of Him as they struck Him**.

The arrest of Jesus took place late at night. While **the council of elders of the people, including the chief priests and the scribes** assembled, **the men who were holding Jesus in custody were making fun of Him**.

³ Luke 22:33

⁴ Matthew 16:16-18

⁵ Luke 8:51

⁶ Matthew 17:1-9

⁷ Mark 14:33

⁸ Luke 22:40

What a terrible ordeal for the innocent Son of Man! Isaiah many years before had prophesied, “*I have given My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out My beard. I have not hidden My face from insults and spittle,*” (50:6). This prophecy was now being realised. Those men played with Jesus as a cat plays with a mouse. They made Him the butt of cruel jokes by covering **His face and asking Him: “Prophecy! Who hit You?”**⁶⁵ **They went on insulting Him in many other ways.** In their cowardly brutality, they could not act viciously enough against this bound and defenceless victim and hurt Him as much as possible, acting just like a mob of savages. They used His mightiest claims to degrade Him. A king, was He? Good; as king they had mockingly clothed and honoured Him. The Messiah? Let Him prove it by prophesying who it was that hit Him. They might have known better. They must have heard of some of what He had said and done, yet nothing made an impression on them. Unbelief had completely hardened their hearts.

Through the beatings and insults, Jesus endured it all without a word of protest. He neither complained nor did He condemn them. Again, Isaiah had prophesied, *Although He was oppressed and He was afflicted, He did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and, as a ewe is silent before those who shear off her wool, so He did not open His mouth,* (Is. 53:7).

Why was Jesus silent when one word would have been enough to quiet this mocking crew? Why was no word spoken? Because of the hardness of these men’s hearts. Such unbelief would not have responded to love, and as for using force, this was not the time. In the future, when Jesus would return in power and great glory, a different story will be told, but here, in the chief priest’s house, He could not and would not do anything but submit.

Nothing much has changed today. Ignorant unbelief is still the cause of scorn that is heaped upon Jesus and His truth. For so many, the idea that Jesus is the Saviour of the world and the Almighty Judge is the very height of foolishness. Even if there are some who do acknowledge Him, they will only say that He isn’t the Son of God, but only a good man, albeit a trifle mad. His way of life will never get you anywhere. They can live much better without Him. They can die much better without Him. They are blind and cannot see the light; so, they scorn Him who is the Light of the world.⁹ They also challenge Him to a demonstration of His glory. “*If there is a God, let Him strike me dead,*” and He remains silent, not because He is incapable of answering, but because they are incapable of receiving His answer. So much unbelief has completely mastered and hardened the hearts of many people. What Christ stands for, what we with Christ stand for, is truth. Truth, though scorned by the mob and by the elite, *remains truth.* With Christ, we can afford to be patient. Jesus is coming again, and the glare of the final fire, which with burning will destroy the elements,¹⁰ will reveal this truth.

Yet the measure of sin as our text depicts it is not yet full.

The men who were holding Jesus in custody scorn the truth which they cannot perceive. **The council of elders of the people, including the chief priests and the scribes** scorn the truth when it is made known to them.

Jesus told **the council** that everything He would choose to say would be so much wasted breath. When they asked Him: “**Are You the Christ? Tell us!**” He replied to them, “**If I tell you, you will not believe Me.**”⁶⁸ **If I ask you a question, you will not answer,**” and then He immediately added: “⁶⁹ **However, from now on the Son of Man will be sitting at the right hand of the power of God.**” That in itself makes plain who He is. They draw the proper conclusion. They pointedly ask Him: “**Are You, then, the Son of God?**” and He gives them an equally pointed and unmistakable answer: “**As you say: I am He.**”

The issue now was as clear as crystal. With the utmost simplicity and yet with infinite dignity Jesus stated His claims. Either they could listen to His words and believe and be saved, or they could reject them and disbelieve and be doomed. These men of Israel chose the latter course.⁷¹ **They asked, “Why do we need any more testimony? We ourselves have heard Him say it.”** In their eyes, Jesus had condemned Himself. He had stated that **from now on the Son of Man will be sitting at the right hand of the power of God.** That was blasphemy deserving of death. So, to death they condemned Him.

Unbelief can go no further. Truth is scorned because it reveals itself as truth. Christ is rejected because He asserts that He is the Christ, the Son of God. He is not wanted. His salvation is not wanted. A Saviour is not necessary. Such a Saviour is not necessary. No longer is ignorance the motivating cause. Knowledge is available, but knowledge is

⁹ John 8:12

¹⁰ 2 Peter 3:10

deliberately scorned.

Let us follow the course of this dreadful sin as we see it developed in the text. The Lord has made Himself known to us. We know that He is the Saviour from sin. I am confident that there is not a single one here who has not at one time or another been touched by His saving love, yet for one reason or another, we deny Him. We deny Him in so many words. More frequently we deny Him by doing what we know we should not do. That is the first step. Lovingly, pleadingly, the Lord looks upon us, as He turned and looked upon Peter who **went outside and wept bitterly**. He repented and did not perish.

If we stoutly disregard that look of the Lord, if we impatiently shake off warnings and admonitions, our hearts become more and more impervious to every divine appeal. Repeated and unwept denials lead to the second step - we no longer are interested in Jesus Christ. We are not fully opposed to Him, but He means nothing to us.

At one time people attended church and were confirmed. At one time they were members and sought to serve their blessed Lord, but they have since grown careless. Relying on themselves, neglecting God's Word, they have denied Christ again and again. Now they are indifferent. Occasionally they will still come to church. Some trace of their former faith and love remains, but it is almost extinct. The danger is that if they continue on this course, they will altogether extinguish it. Then the downward pace is accelerated. Indifference leads to mockery and mockery to open enmity, and if no repentance follows, the final step is taken - Jesus Christ is brazenly rejected. Truth is scorned, and He, the Holy One of God, is virtually labelled a liar.

In every phase of the process, the same unbelief is displayed. Persistent denial of Jesus Christ alienates from Him and leads to hatred. We must admit that we, too, have denied the Lord in word and deed. Perhaps we must even admit that at times we have grown indifferent toward Him. Surely, then, we cannot look disdainfully upon Peter, who denied his Lord, upon the men who mocked Him, or upon the council which condemned Him. Unbelief did that in each case, and that same unbelief can easily sneak into our hearts.

Let us humbly continue to be repentant and pray that our faith will not fail us, nor lead a life of unbelief. Instead, remembering the words of Hebrews 12:1-2, *let us also lay aside every impediment, and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and let us run with patient endurance the race that has been set before us!* ² *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith! For the sake of the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* Jesus has done this for us so that we have eternal life. To Him be glory and honour now and for ever! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Lord God, heavenly Father, limitless in love, and perfect in power, receive our worship and praise. Our eyes always turn to You, for without You there is no help, and with You there is no danger. Be the guardian and defender of all who lift up their hearts to You, of all who seek Your help in times of need.

We confess that we fully deserve Your wrath for breaking Your holy commandments. Therefore we thank You for Your great love in Jesus, who in His compassion and grace sacrificed Himself for our sins. With grateful hearts we praise You for His finished work: His holy life, His blessed example, His gracious teaching, His loving companionship, and His atoning death, and the place in Your kingdom that He has won for us.

Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may follow the example of Jesus, and walk in love. Grant that, as Your children, we may continue to repent of our sins, give up the ways of darkness and error, and walk in paths that are good, righteous, and true. Fill our lives with holiness, with love of Your Word, and with every grace and virtue.

Prosper and protect the work of Your Church. Give success to all who proclaim the glorious Gospel of salvation. Give conviction and faithfulness to all Your people, that they may work with zeal to gather in the harvest of Christ's redeemed people. Continue to bless the work of the AELC and the ULMA.

Rule and direct our government. Give wisdom and integrity to all in our police and armed forces, that our nation may be kept in peace, and that righteousness and justice may hold sway everywhere.

We pray for all in any need of body or soul, for all loved ones in distant places, for all who have strayed from Your truth, for all who are in temptation, for all who are suffering sickness and pain, and for all who mourn. Bless and help

them according to their need. Hear their prayers. Comfort them with Your presence.

We thank You for hearing our prayers and sending rain. Continue to bless us with good weather that our farmers may continue in their work of feeding the nation.

Unite in one spirit through the truth all in Your Church on earth, and finally bring us to Your joys in heaven. We pray for these things in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Ezekiel 33:7-20

⁷ “As for you, son of man, I have appointed you as a watchman for the family of Israel. You shall listen to what I say and give them a warning from Me! ⁸ When I tell a wicked person, ‘You wicked person, you will certainly die!’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked person to turn from his way, that wicked person will die in his wickedness, but I shall hold you responsible for his death. ⁹ However, if you warn a wicked person to turn from his way, and he has not turned from his way, he will die because of his sin. However, you yourself will have saved your own life.

¹⁰ “As for you, son of man, tell the family of Israel, ‘This is what you have been saying: “Our wrongdoings and our sins are weighing us down. We are wasting away because of them. How, then, can we live?”’

¹¹ “Tell them, ‘As surely as I live,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘I certainly take no pleasure in the death of a wicked person. Rather, I take pleasure in the wicked person’s turning from his way that he may live. Turn back! Turn back from your evil ways! Why, then, will you die, family of Israel?’

¹² “As for you, son of man, tell your countrymen, ‘The righteousness of a righteous person will not deliver him on the day when he rebels. On the day when a wicked person turns from his wickedness, he will not stumble because of his wickedness. The righteous person will not be able to live because of his righteousness on the day when he sins. ¹³ When I promise a righteous person that he will certainly live, and he then trusts in his own righteousness and commits evil, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered. Rather, he will die because of his evil, which he has committed. ¹⁴ When I tell a wicked person, “You will certainly die,” and he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right, ¹⁵ if the wicked person returns the security for a loan, makes restitution for what he has stolen, lives by the Statutes of life and does not commit evil, then he will certainly live. He will not die. ¹⁶ None of his sins, which he has committed, will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right. He will

certainly live.’

¹⁷ “However, your countrymen are saying, ‘The Way of the Lord is not just,’ when it is their own way that is not just. ¹⁸ When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and commits evil, he will die because of it. ¹⁹ When a wicked person turns away from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he will live because of it. ²⁰ Nevertheless, you are saying, ‘The Way of the Lord is not just.’ You family of Israel, I shall judge each of you according to his own ways.”

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

¹ I want you to know, fellow-Christians, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea. ² They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and they all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that accompanied them, and that Rock was Christ. ⁵ Yet God was not pleased with most of them. For they were scattered over the desert. ⁶ Now, these things happened as examples for us, that we might not covet what is evil as they coveted them. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were, as the Scripture has said, “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to play”! ⁸ Let us not sin sexually as some of them did! Twenty-three thousand fell on one day. ⁹ Let us not put Christ to a test, as some of them did! They were destroyed by snakes. ¹⁰ Do not grumble, as some of them grumbled! The angel of death destroyed them. ¹¹ These things happened to them to give examples to others and were written down to warn us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore, the one who thinks that he is standing firm should beware that he does not fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to all human beings. However, God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond what you can bear. Rather, when you are tested, He will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Luke 13:1-9

¹ At that time some people were present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² Jesus answered them, “Do you think

that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³ I tell you, no. However, unless you repent, you too will all perish in a similar way. ⁴ Or do you think that those eighteen who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them were guiltier than all the other people who were living in Jerusalem were? ⁵ I tell you, no; but, unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way.”

⁶ Jesus told them this parable: “A man had a fig tree that had been planted in his vineyard. He came looking

for fruit on it but did not find any. ⁷ He told the man who worked the vineyard, ‘Look here! For the last three years I have been coming here looking for fruit on this fig tree and have not been finding any. Therefore, cut it down! Why does it keep using up the ground?’

⁸ “However, the man answered him, ‘Sir, allow it to stand this year also, until I dig around it and put fertiliser on it! ⁹ If the tree bears fruit in future, fine. However, if it does not, you will cut it down.’”