

Theme: Powerful Words – Powerful Passion – “I Am Not He!”

Text: John 18:15-18; 25-27

¹⁵ And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. ¹⁶ But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." ¹⁸ Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself...²⁵ Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not!" ²⁶ One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" ²⁷ Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.

Do you remember the children's story "The Little Red Hen"? There are a few variations to the story, but the general idea is this: An industrious hen finds some grains of wheat on the ground and asks her barnyard friends to help her plant them, harvest the wheat, grind it, and finally bake it into a cake. All her lazy barnyard friends refuse. You may remember the famous refrains of the story, "Not!" said the dog. "Not!" said the cat, "Not!" said the pig, and so on. When it comes time to *eat* the cake, however, all the little red hen's barnyard friends suddenly want to "help out," but instead the hen eats the cake all by herself. The other animals wanted the benefits of eating a cake, but didn't want any of the responsibility or the hard work that was involved with making a cake.

In our text we heard one of Jesus' disciples sound a little bit like the farm animals in "The Little Red Hen." **"You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?" (v. 17).** "Not!" said the Peter. Ironic, since just a few hours earlier Peter had boldly declared, **"Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33).** When Jesus was arrested by His enemies in the garden, Peter proved his willingness to back up his promise by drawing his sword to fight even against the overwhelming odds. But Jesus did not want to be rescued by Peter's sword. He willingly was arrested by His enemies because it was part of His responsibility as the Messiah to save the world from sin by His sacrifice. Now at the moment of truth, when it has become obvious to Peter just what kind of a Savior Jesus is and what He is about to allow to happen to Himself, he has a choice to make:

- 1) He could speak up and declare his allegiance to his Savior and point out the significance of His incredible sacrifice to the people standing by (this was, after all, a perfect time to witness to these people and answer their questions about Jesus), or...
- 2) He could show that he was scared, and even ashamed to be associated with such a humble Savior.

Peter no doubt loved all the benefits of being a follower (disciple) of Jesus: being in the presence of Jesus, the Son of God; witnessing His miracles; listening to His teaching; enjoying fellowship with Him and the other disciples; and looking forward to sharing in the eternal joys of heaven. But at this moment Peter wanted nothing to do with the responsibilities or the "hard work" that is involved with being a disciple of Christ.

Did you notice the similarity between today's **"Powerful Words"** from Jesus' **"Powerful Passion"** – **"I am not he!** – and the words we considered on our first Lenten service on Ash Wednesday – **"I am He!"**? That one little word **"not"** makes all the difference, doesn't it? So do the men who spoke these words. As we heard in our Ash Wednesday service these words from Jesus, **"I am He!"** were not just an admission of His identity, but an acceptance of the incredible responsibility and sacrifice that were involved with being

the Messiah. With these words He showed us the acceptance of Christian responsibility in the ultimate sense. Peter did not. With his words, **"I am not he,"** Peter shirked his Christian responsibility and denied that he even knew Jesus, not just once, but three times, as Jesus had predicted earlier that night (**John 13:38**). Mark tells us in his Gospel that in his third denial, Peter backed it up with cursing and swearing, **"Then he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know this Man of whom you speak!'"** (**Mark 14:71**).

In stark contrast to Jesus, Peter was quite possibly the *worst* example of accepting Christian responsibility. ...that is until we take a look at the "chief of sinners" that stares back at us in the mirror every day! When we examine our own hearts and lives we will quickly see that we are all too eager to join the barnyard animals of "The Little Red Hen" and say, "Not I!" when it comes to accepting the responsibility and hard work that are involved with being a follower of Christ—what Jesus described as **"denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily, and following Him"** (**Luke 9:23**).

Now, it's not always an open denial of Christ accompanied by cursing and swearing like Peter's—in fact none of us have probably ever denied Jesus in this way. But our own words and actions have many times and in many different ways denied Christ. Sure, we love the benefits of being a follower of Christ: worshipping in God's presence at His house, hearing of the miracles and learning the teachings of Jesus from the Scriptures, enjoying the fellowship with Him through the Word and the Sacraments, enjoying the fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ, experiencing the peace of forgiveness and looking forward to sharing in the eternal joys of heaven. But when the "moments of truth" happen in our lives are we always ready and willing to accept our Christian responsibilities and do the "hard work" that God has also called us to do?

Like Peter, our true tests of character and faith don't usually come at the hands of armed soldiers or obvious enemies of God's Word—we'd gladly and proudly stand up against them. Our true tests usually come in more subtle forms like the "harmless" servant girl who opened the gate for Peter. When we are asked by the co-worker at the water cooler, the classmate or teacher at school, the guy or girl we work out with at the gym, or by some new acquaintance we've just met **"You are not also one of His disciples, are you?"** (**v. 17**), how do we respond?

The question does not always come in that form either. Sometimes it comes in the form of a sacrilegious joke, or even in just a general conversation about faith and religion. Our answer is not always a blatant verbal denial either, but how we respond to people's jokes or comments about Jesus—both by our words and actions—speaks volumes about what we think of Him. Do we use these excellent, everyday witnessing opportunities as a chance to glorify Jesus' name and show others how much we appreciate our loving Savior, or do we shrink back and show by our words and our body language that we are in fact ashamed of the One who was beaten and bloodied and hung on the cross for us?

It's probably more than a bit depressing to look back over our lives and see how many times we have, like Peter, denied our association with Jesus. But take heart! We can also receive a great amount of encouragement from Peter's story. After his third denial of Christ, John tells us in our text, **"immediately a rooster crowed"** (**v. 27**). Luke tells us in His Gospel, **And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' So Peter went out and wept bitterly** (**Luke 22:61-62**). Peter's tears were tears of shame, tears of sorrow over what he had done to His Lord and Savior, but most importantly they were tears of repentance. Peter knew that his sins of irresponsibility, weakness, and yes even his denial of Jesus were going to be all paid for on that cross and He trusted in Jesus for that forgiveness. After His resurrection Jesus would later restore Peter and assure Him of His place as one of His apostles and gave him the command, **"Feed my sheep"** (**John 21:17**).

After His *restoration*, Jesus completed Peter's *transformation*. At Pentecost He sent His Holy Spirit to Peter and the rest of the apostles, and Peter, led by that same Spirit, boldly preached one of the greatest sermons of all time before the crowd in Jerusalem. Through Peter's words the Lord worked some 3000 conversions! Even after Peter's own arrest before some of the same men who put Jesus on trial and crucified Him, he still spoke boldly for his Savior. In the book of Acts we hear Peter tell the Jewish council concerning Jesus, "**Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**" **Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:12-13).**

Note the significance of that last line; "**they** [the Jewish high priests and council] **realized that they had been with Jesus**" (Acts 4:13). There is no longer any denial of his association with Jesus as Peter had done when the servant girl and the people by the fire in the courtyard had recognized that he had been with Jesus. Instead He boldly proclaimed the saving name of Jesus even before men who could have caused him great harm, even death. What a transformation!

What we all need to realize is that the same Jesus who restored Peter also sees our repentant tears and hears our cries for forgiveness and restores us! Yes, our sins of irresponsibility, weakness, and even outright denial of Him were what sent Him to the cross, but these and all our sins were also fully paid for by Jesus on that cross. The same Holy Spirit that transformed Peter from coward to confident proclaimer of Christ has also been given to us. Jesus has sent His Spirit to us through His word to transform our weak, irresponsible hearts from saying "**Not I!**" to "**Here am I! Send me.**" (Isaiah 6:8). May God give each one of us such courageous and willing hearts! Amen.