

**Mar. 23, 2014 - Peter's Denial**  
**John 18:01-27**

“Who Are you?”

As John tells this part of the story, he sets up a contrasting back and forth between the interrogation of Jesus and the interrogation of Peter. First Jesus is asked a question. Then the scene shifts outside to where Peter is asked a question. then back inside to Jesus, etc. Probably a lot of sermons have been preached about how we are no better than Peter because we deny Jesus in a thousand ways every day. That’s worth thinking about, but it’s not really where I’m going today. Today I just want you to focus on the difference, the contrast between the trial of Jesus and the trial of Peter.

But I want to begin with arrest of Jesus in the garden. As John tells it, Jesus is in total control of the whole thing. Picture the scene. It’s night. There are no streetlights. It’s dark. Jesus and his disciples are outside the city in the Kidron valley. A group of soldiers and police attached to the high priest come to arrest Jesus. Most likely they are carrying torches. You think Jesus didn’t see them coming? Of course he did. But he stays right where he is.

As if to emphasize the point, when this party arrives Jesus asks them, “Whom are you looking for?” Notice the “whom.” Apparently Jesus speaks excellent English. When the party of soldiers and police say, “Jesus of Nazareth,” Jesus says, “you found him. That’s me.” Or, should to continue in excellent English mode, “I am he.” Those carrying clubs and swords and spears are so taken aback by Jesus’ calm that in the face of this hostile crowd, they fall backwards. Those carrying the clubs and swords and spears are not in control; Jesus is. Side note: Peter’s behavior in this scene—his cutting off the ear of one of the high priest’s slaves— is impulsive, brave and foolish.

So Jesus is arrested. They take him to see Caiaphas, the High Priest for the year (it rotated on a yearly basis). Caiaphas had unwittingly exercised his role as high priest by proclaiming the mission of Jesus when he said, “It is better for one man to die than for the whole nation to perish.”

And now we’re ready for the interrogations. Peter is questioned first. Peter is still brave. Of all the disciples, he comes closest to fidelity. He had vowed to Jesus that he would never abandon him, and so far he remains true to his word. He and another disciple are outside in the courtyard waiting to see what will happen. While there Peter is questioned by a woman: “You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?” In effect her question is, “Who are you?” And now, being surrounded by potentially hostile forces, Peter chickens out. He denies who he is. He answers, “I am not.”

Switch scenes. Jesus is questioned not by a woman but by the High Priest in room with soldiers and police. “What is it that you are teaching?” Jesus answers, “It’s all been out in the open. Why don’t you just ask those who heard me teach?” *pause*. Here’s Peter out in the courtyard denying he is one of Jesus’ followers, and here is Jesus, knowing that his time of teaching is over and that

if anyone is ever to know what he said, it'll be up to disciples like Peter to pass it on. Kinda pouts Peter's denial in its full context.

The scene shifts back to the courtyard. Peter stands by a charcoal fire warming himself. Someone else asks him who he is, and again he denies his identity. Then, to make it impossible for Peter to deny his relationship with Jesus, one of those who had been part of the arresting party says, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" Again, Peter denies it, and at that moment the cock crows.

This reading is not about Peter. Like all of Jesus' followers, he's a mixed bag. He's brave—and cowardly; faithfully true to his word—and unfaithful to both his word and his true identity. This reading is not about him. This reading is about Jesus who is solid as a rock. Jesus knows that if anyone is ever to know who he is and what he taught, it'll be up to disciples like Peter and you and me. And Jesus has perfect confidence in Peter and in you and me. You may not have confidence in yourself, but Jesus does. Jesus will give Peter another chance the next time Peter finds himself around a charcoal fire. Three times Jesus will ask Simon Peter if he loves him, once for each of Peter's denials. And Peter will answer, "I do." And so will we. Because even when we forget who we really are, Jesus remembers.