



Week 3 - Denial

Events build upon each other in our lives. For example, each step of our faith journey affects the next. Each promotion at work leads us down a particular career path. The peaceful, grace-filled life Jesus lived before his crucifixion amplifies its impact on the world.

Our steps through life do not always go as planned. In Matthew 26, Peter denies Jesus despite following him for years. Peter had faced long odds with Jesus, witnessed him perform many miracles, and sat at his feet as an eager student. Their existing relationship sharpens Peter's denial.

Today, we look at our own capacity for denial, seeking to relate to Peter rather than condemn him. We also anticipate the grace of God's forgiveness that awaits us.



Asbury
come. build. love.

Begin by praying for the Holy Spirit to be with the group and guide its discussion.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Tonight you will all fall away because of me. This is because it is written, I will hit the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will go off in all directions. But after I'm raised up, I'll go before you to Galilee."

Peter replied, "If everyone else stumbles because of you, I'll never stumble."

Jesus said to him, "I assure you that, before the rooster crows tonight, you will deny me three times."

Peter said, "Even if I must die alongside you, I won't deny you." All the disciples said the same thing.

[Matthew 26:31-35]

Meanwhile, Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant woman came and said to him, "You were also with Jesus the Galilean."

But he denied it in front of all of them, saying, "I don't know what you are talking about."

When he went over to the gate, another woman saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus, the man from Nazareth."

With a solemn pledge, he denied it again, saying, "I don't know the man."

A short time later those standing there came and said to Peter, "You must be one of them. The way you talk gives you away."

Then he cursed and swore, "I don't know the man!" At that very moment the rooster crowed. Peter remembered Jesus' words,

“Before the rooster crows you will deny me three times.” And Peter went out and cried uncontrollably.

[Matthew 26:57-68]

Peter

- All of the disciples said they would never abandon Jesus, but Matthew only tells us about Peter’s denial. How do you imagine the other disciples responded to their own falling away? Were they as touched as Peter? Were they agreeing with Peter to save face?
- Peter is emphatic that he will not deny Jesus. Why do you think he was unable to follow through with his claim? What do you think was going through his mind?
- Peter cried uncontrollably after the rooster crowed. Describe the physical and emotional sensations you imagine he felt. For how long do you think Peter’s denial affected emotionally and spiritually? How do you think it affected the way the other disciples saw him?

Jesus

- Jesus confidently tells the disciples that they will all fall away that night. What effect does this have on Jesus? What does this tell us about who Jesus is?
- Jesus seems less upset than Peter and the disciples. Why do you think this is?

Us

- Peter's conviction that he would not fall away failed to prevent him from denying Jesus. When have you faced pressure to compromise your beliefs or convictions? How can we follow our convictions when Peter fails to follow his? What happens when we cannot?
- Peter is an emotional wreck when he realizes he denied Jesus just as Jesus predicted. What role do emotions play in your spiritual journey? What role should they play? Are some emotions more appropriate than others? If so, why?
- Peter's denial was public. How do we react differently to public failings versus private failings? When have you experienced public or private remorse? What did it teach you about yourself and your faith?
- Jesus has a better track record of predicting the future than any of us, but we often get a feeling for how something will go. How do you respond when you know things will go poorly? What if you are sure they will succeed?
- Read John 21:15-19. Peter's faith journey is complicated. Where have you experienced complexities in your own spiritual journey? What insights can we draw from Peter's experience?

Close by praying for each person to have strength in their convictions and embrace the complexities of faith.