

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Easter 4

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Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl

Your Good Shepherd heals your wounds.

For this is favorable: if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God. ²⁰ For what credit is it to you if you receive a beating for sinning and patiently endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God.

²¹ Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps. ²² He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. ²³ When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

—1 Peter 2:19-25

Do you wonder if maybe Peter was thinking about that night in the high priest's courtyard when he wrote these words? It was 30 years after that event when he wrote this letter, but I would surmise that the events of the dreadful night were still very vivid in his memory. When Peter writes these words to Christians who were being pressed for their faith, I'm sure he remembers very vividly the night when his faith was pressed. He could place himself with those Christians when he writes, **"For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."**

Peter was writing this letter to Christians who were tempted to walk away from Jesus because of pressures. I'm sure he has in mind his own temptations and pressures from 30 years earlier. When Peter presents two scenarios of suffering in these words, I wonder if he is thinking about himself and Jesus. The first scenario: a man commits a crime, and then he endures the painful consequences of that crime without complaint. There's nothing particularly noble about that. The guy is getting what he deserves. And then the second scenario: a man does what is right because he is conscious of God, and then he accepts the painful consequences for doing what is right without complaint. That's a favorable situation, Peter says.

He's got to be writing from experience. I'm sure he thinks back to that night before Jesus died. You remember what Peter promised right before they headed out for the Garden of Gethsemane. "Jesus, I will lay down my life for you. Even if all fall away, I will never fall away. Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you."

Peter was conscious of God, and he was determined to live like that no matter what it would cost him, even if it would cost him his life. But then how long did it take before he did something *not* favorable? Even if we forget the part of dozing off in the Garden while Jesus was praying, what was it? Like a few hours? When Peter was right outside the high priest's courtroom on his own, Peter was cursing and swearing that he didn't even know who Jesus is. How could that unravel so fast?

Well, do you think Peter thought this through in the courtyard? "Maybe if I don't deny Jesus too loudly, he won't hear me and he won't know the difference." But then his denials get louder and louder, and Jesus walks out of the room and looks at Peter, and Peter says, "Ugh. I'm busted." I don't think that's the way it happened.

When Jesus turned and looked at Peter and Peter broke down and wept bitterly, he was overwhelmed with guilt, and that wasn't just for getting caught. When Jesus came out of the high priest's courtroom, he looked at Peter. That's when Peter realized the evil that he had done. You could say that when Jesus looked at Peter, it turned his conscience on.

Today is often designated as Good Shepherd Sunday. When we hear about this truth, we can understand the picture. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and we are the sheep. Sheep often wander away from the shepherd. And when they do, they are the target for wolves and lions. That night Peter wandered away from Jesus. And he was a target for Satan's attacks. And when he denied his Good Shepherd, when he called down curses upon himself that he did not know Jesus, Jesus' look turned on Peter's conscience. And he felt the guilt.

I think we've all experienced that to some degree, haven't we? Maybe the best way to think about that is to think of our conscience as having different settings. Have you ever experienced that? You have a personal judgment of what's right and what's wrong, what's acceptable and what's something that you dare not do. And those situations depend to some degree on where you and whom you are with. Right?

Your conscience has a setting for home, a setting for work and school, a setting for church. Your conscience has a setting of when you are in front of your parents, when you are in front of your kids, when it's just you and your spouse together, and when it's just you all by yourself.

Your conscience pricks in different ways based on those settings, right? There are things that you wouldn't dream of doing in front of your mom or saying in front of your pastor that you don't think twice about in front of your friend. I'm not saying that's right. I'm just saying that our conscience pricks us in different ways and in different settings.

Let me give you an example. Imagine that you're gossiping about someone freely without giving a second thought. You're talking about someone in a way that doesn't build up that person or protect that person's reputation. But what are you really doing? What you are doing is you are stabbing them in the back again and again. But honestly, the way it strikes you, it's just a conversation. And then you turn around, and you see that person standing right behind you. The reason why you feel shame is not just because you got busted. It's because at that moment you realized that you were doing something absolutely wicked. Hopefully you don't just regret the consequences, but you regret the sin that you didn't even realize what you were doing.

When Peter stood in the high priest's courtyard, he didn't fully understand what he was saying. And then Jesus appeared, and the Bible tells us that **"The Lord turned and looked at Peter"** (Luke 22:61). Jesus didn't even say a word. He just stood there and looked at Peter. And that's all it took for Peter's conscience to go from "out of order" to "Warning! Warning!"

My friends, I think that can be a useful diagnostic exercise for us. Think about what you've done, what you've said. Think about the things you have failed to do and the things you have failed to say. Think about this past week, just the past day. What are some things that should have made your conscience scream, but they didn't even register with your conscience. Maybe you were talking to a coworker about another coworker. Maybe you were doing something in the privacy of your home. Put yourself back in that situation. Would things have registered differently for you if you knew that Jesus was standing behind you looking at you?

He was, of course. His eyes are always on you. But what would have been different if that would have occurred to you at that moment? Would you have said those words? Would you have done that act? I think that's a useful diagnostic tool for our consciences.

But what our consciences need is not only a diagnosis and a calibration reset. Do you know what else your conscience needs? Cleansing, healing. And to get that cleansing and healing, we can't just stop reading where Jesus turned and looked at Peter. We need to read on, even looking at what Peter writes in his letter for us today.

When Jesus turns and looks at Peter, what did Jesus do? Well, what didn't he do? He didn't throw up his arms in disgust, stomp out of that courtroom, throw his enemies against the wall, and yell, "I don't know why I should bother dying for you, Peter, if you aren't even going to acknowledge who I am."

You see, Peter's despicable denial is the reason why Jesus is there. Peter is so afraid and so ashamed. Without a second thought, he had just done what he claimed was impossible of doing. And now, broken and ashamed he looks entirely inward at his guilt. It doesn't even cross his mind what Jesus is still doing. What Jesus was doing wasn't on Peter's mind, but Peter was on Jesus' mind. And so were you.

That's the amazing thing about our Good Shepherd. We may not always have Jesus on our mind, but he always has us on his mind. We might think that we are so strong and capable. But the reality is that we are sheep who could easily stray away from Jesus. We are guilty and desperately in need of a cleansing. We are wounded and desperately in need of healing. That's exactly what Jesus did. And as our living Good Shepherd, that's exactly what he continues to do.

As Peter writes these words to Christians who are like vulnerable sheep, do you wonder if maybe he was thinking about that night? Do you wonder if as he wrote these words he was thinking not just about his own suffering, but also about Jesus suffering?

"Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps. ²² He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. ²³ When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed."

As Peter writes these words, I think Peter was thinking about his suffering conscience that night in the high priest's courtyard. But I think he was also remembering why Jesus was there looking at him: to take away his guilt, to take Peter's guilt away from him and make it his own. And that's not just in a figurative sense. Jesus was there to take

Peter's guilt away from him and make it his own in a very physical sense and then let God's justice be served on him. That is our Good Shepherd!

I asked you earlier to think about the things that you've done, even just today. I asked you to think about things that should have made your conscience scream, but instead it didn't even register. Did you think of one? Don't just think about what you did. Now think about what Jesus did. Jesus' reaction to your sin isn't to shake his head in disgust and walk away. He took that sin and he made it his. And he gave himself over to the one who judges justly.

Whatever sin is on your mind right now, the one that you didn't even give a second thought to earlier today, whatever it is, your **Good Shepherd heals your wounds**. Amen.