

SEEING JESUS IN JOHN

WEEK FORTY: PETER DENIES JESUS

READING

15 Simon Peter followed Jesus, as did another of the disciples. That other disciple was acquainted with the high priest, so he was allowed to enter the high priest's courtyard with Jesus. 16 Peter had to stay outside the gate. Then the disciple who knew the high priest spoke to the woman watching at the gate, and she let Peter in. 17 The woman asked Peter, "You're not one of that man's disciples, are you?" "No," he said, "I am not." 18 Because it was cold, the household servants and the guards had made a charcoal fire. They stood around it, warming themselves, and Peter stood with them, warming himself.

25 Meanwhile, as Simon Peter was standing by the fire warming himself, they asked him again, "You're not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it, saying, "No, I am not." 26 But one of the household slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Didn't I see you out there in the olive grove with Jesus?" 27 Again Peter denied it. And immediately a rooster crowed. John 18:15-18, 25-27 (NLT)

TEACHING

In this story, we read about one of the lowest moments of Peter's life. Jesus has been arrested and now he is being dragged into what was essentially an illegal trial. The religious leaders wanted to find Jesus guilty of a dangerous crime so they could hand him over to the Romans for execution. Peter can't go into the trial so he is standing out in the courtyard waiting to hear any news. People begin to recognize Peter as a friend and follower of Jesus.

Just a few hours earlier, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times before the rooster crowed. Peter strongly disagreed – he claimed he was willing to die for Jesus. But in moments of uncertainty and fear, Peter denies knowing Jesus – three times. It's easy to pick on Peter and think he was a coward, but Peter loved Jesus very much and was determined to follow him. What happened?

It's the same thing that happens to you and me when we fear what people think of us more than we fear (respect and honor) God. We say things and do things in an attempt to protect ourselves or prove ourselves. Only a heart changed by God's unconditional love can be free from the fear of others. Later in the gospel of John, Jesus will help Peter understand God's great love for him. Don't worry –Peter's story isn't over.

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RESPONSE

OPENING QUESTION(S):

- What is something you are afraid of?

TODDLERS/PRE-K:

- In this story, who is waiting to hear news about Jesus' trial?
- What did Peter say when people recognized him as one of Jesus' friends?

CHILDREN:

- What did Peter say when people recognized him as one of Jesus' friends?
- Why did Peter respond the way he did?
- What is dangerous about fearing what other people think?

TEENAGERS:

- Why did Peter deny knowing Jesus?
- What are some ways we deny Jesus with our words and our lives?
- How does the love of God drive out the fear of others?

ADULTS:

- How might fear keep you from acknowledging and honoring Jesus?
- What are some ways we deny Jesus with our words and our lives?

PRAYER

God, I admit that there are times in my life that I deny that I know you. With my lips I say that I trust you, but with my life I trust in other things more. I sing songs about how you are first place in my life, but often I want to be first place in my own life – I want to do my own thing and not have to answer to you. Forgive me. Help me to run to you when I fail. Keep me from running from you. Thank you that you are always there – with open arms – to forgive, love and restore me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NEXT LEVEL (ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL TEACHING)

Years later, Peter wrote these words: *6 So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. 7 These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. (1 Peter 1 NLT)* I imagine he was thinking of the trials he endured – including this terrible moment. But God used it to strengthen him!