

Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion

THREE STRIKES AND YOU'RE ... SAVED?

Mark 14:1-15:47 (selected verses)

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Analysis by Bill White

26 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 27 And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written,

*'I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.'*

28 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." 29 Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." 30 Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." 31 But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.

66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." 68 But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. 69 And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." 70 But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you

are one of them; for you are a Galilean.” 71 But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know this man you are talking about.” 72 At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

39 Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

– Mark 14:26-31, 66-72; 15:39 (NRSV)

DIAGNOSIS: BY GOD, I’M TELLING YOU I DON’T KNOW HIM!

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Denying Christ*

Peter has followed Jesus and those who have arrested him into the courtyard of the High Priest’s house. Mere hours before, on the Mount of Olives, Peter has said to Jesus, “Even though all become deserters, I will not” (v. 29), and “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you” (v. 31). Now, as Jesus has foretold, Peter denies three times he even knows Jesus, the third time swearing an oath, saying in effect, I swear to God I do not know the man you are talking about!

Notice at the end of v. 31 that not just Peter but all of the disciples pledge with their lives they will not deny Jesus. And we as modern day disciples, when the public pressure is really on, will we deny we even know Jesus?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Doubting Christ*

Peter’s denial exposes his inner doubts and fears-fear of what others are saying and will say about him, fear of what others are thinking and will think about him, fear of what others are

doing and will do to him. This kind of fear reveals, when push comes to shove, Peter does not really fear, love and trust that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One.

Notice the context, the sharp contrast between the faithfulness of Jesus on trial and the unfaithfulness of Peter when he is “on trial.” And Peter’s “public” trial is not really all that threatening of a situation and certainly not a glamorous, heroic setting for martyrdom, just a pointed statement that requires a simple response, “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth” (v. 67).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Three Strikes and You’re Out*

Peter’s fear has led him to speak and act in a manner he now regrets, I don’t believe Jesus is the Son of Man! Hell, I don’t even know the man! “At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.’ And he broke down and wept” (v. 72). In the midst of his tearful regret, perhaps other words of Jesus are coming into Peter’s mind: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:34-38).

Now what? Peter has had three opportunities to be faithful, and three times he has failed. “Hell, I don’t even know the man!” Apart from Christ it is hell indeed! For Peter, and all would-be

disciples, apart from Christ it's three strikes and you're out!
But...

PROGNOSIS: JESUS, BY GOD, KNOWS HIM

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Three Strikes and You're ... Saved*

But this Jesus is God's Messiah. At the cross of Golgotha he conquers for all time the powers of the terrible trinity: sin, Satan, and death. Jesus is the One who is perfectly faithful to his mission, perfectly faithful throughout his trial, his suffering, faithful even unto death on a cross. And at the foot of the cross a centurion (of all people!) bears witness to the Gospel: "Truly this man was God's Son!" (15:39). Yes, Jesus is dead and buried (vv. 15:44-47). But soon, very soon, the women will discover an empty tomb! And as Jesus has proclaimed, the day will come when all will see this Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven (14:62).

In the meantime, the promise is there for all who believe that Jesus is Messiah. In Christ there is victory over sin, evil, and death; there is-even after three strikes-forgiveness and new life in Christ for all who believe.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Trusting Christ*
This forgiveness and new life comes to Peter. As promised, Christ sends the Holy Spirit to Peter, trumping his doubts and fears with a real, living, powerful faith in Jesus the Messiah. This is faith that assures Peter he is forgiven for times past of denying Christ. This is faith that empowers Peter to face future times of trial and tribulation.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *I Do Know Him*
Moreover, this is faith that gives confidence and power to live the faith now and in the future. Peter will again find himself

under public scrutiny because of Christ. He will again face "public trial." And God's Holy Spirit will empower him through faith in Christ to bear witness to the Good News that Jesus is Messiah even unto death.

Times of temptation to deny Christ also occur for modern day Christians. We will face situations where we are tempted to publically deny Christ and to act contrary to God's Word and will. The Good News is that the same faith that empowered Peter to bear witness faithfully is available to us too! Yes, we will experience times of fear for our own safety, i.e. fear of the consequences of our public martyrdom. We will be tempted to deny our relationship to Christ. But we can trust Jesus' promise to give us his Holy Spirit to strengthen us for every challenge. We can pray confidently that the Lord will give us courage to say in our times of trial, "I do know him and I believe he is Messiah."