

[1] The Denial Luke 22:54-62

This is an adaptation of a sermon originally prepared for Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Burnsville, MN, March 7-8, 2015. <http://popmn.org/worship/changing-church/>

I have a video clip I want to show you this morning - pay special attention to the faces of the people in the video

[2] video Clip <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/49035/grace>

[3] The faces of the kids in that video are just awesome, aren't they? I love the initial mix of joy and mischievousness, and then the look of regret and reluctance. But what I really find interesting in that video is the father's face. At first his face is filled with anger. It says, "You've blown it, and you know it. I'm mad and you're going to get what's coming to you." But then his face breaks into an incredible smile that conveys both love and joy.

[4] So here's the question I want you to reflect on today: which "father face" do you see in your mind when you think about God? When you imagine God looking at you, what do you see?

During this Lenten season we've been walking alongside Jesus during the last days of his life. By living more deeply into Jesus' story we're finding all sorts of connection points with our own story. Today we heard the painful story of Peter denying Jesus.

[5] Let's put this story into context. Jesus and his disciples finished their Last Supper in the Upper Room and made their way to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed and was later arrested. Upon his arrest every one of Jesus' disciples ran for their lives, fearful that they, too, would be arrested. Everyone, that is, except Peter.

For reasons Luke doesn't give us, Peter followed Jesus when Jesus was dragged off to the home of the High Priest for questioning. Peter stood in the courtyard, waiting and warming himself by a fire, along with soldiers and household servants. Around that fire Peter was identified three times as a follower of Jesus, but just as Jesus had predicted Peter, out of fear, denied ever knowing Jesus.

But I think the most interesting part of the story is a small and often overlooked detail. Luke tells us that after Peter denied knowing Jesus for the third time a rooster crowed, and Jesus turned and looked at Peter. And it's at that moment that Peter remembered what Jesus had said, that he would deny him. And it's at that moment that Peter is filled with grief and, weeping bitterly, ran off into the night.

[6] So here's the question: **what did Peter see in Jesus' face?** Was it anger? Disappointment? Judgment? An "I told you so" look? Was it a look of pain? A look of compassion? A look of love and understanding?

Close your eyes for just a moment. Imagine that you're Peter. What do you see in Jesus' face?

[7] The word "countenance" refers to one's facial expressions, and countenance is a powerful communicator. The human face can display over 10,000 unique facial expression combinations, communicating everything from fear to favor, joy to disgust.

Research has shown that by 12 months, babies use visual information from the faces of their caregivers to make sense of situations that are new or unclear. And we continue to understand ourselves and our relationship to others through their countenance. Remember that look your mother could give you that would stop you in your tracks? Yeah, you know the one I mean. That's the power of countenance.

When I was a senior in high school, I had jaw surgery and my jaw was wired shut for 8 weeks (I'm sure there are some people who might wish it still was ☺). Even though it was hard for me to speak and many times even harder for others to understand, I was told that my facial expressions communicated a lot. That's the power of countenance.

[8] Look at this picture – This is the Mona Lisa painted by Leonardo Da Vinci. For nearly 500 years people have been obsessed with this painting, not because it's so spectacular but because Mona Lisa's countenance is so ambiguous. What her face

says to you has more to do with what's inside of you than what is on the canvas.

And I would suggest to you that that's also true when it comes to Jesus' countenance in today's text. I suspect that Luke intentionally leaves the look on Jesus' face to our imagination as a way of provoking us to deeper thought about how we see his countenance, and what that means about us.

[9] So, how do you see Jesus? When you imagine Jesus looking at you, someone every bit as flawed and faithless as Peter, what do you see in Jesus' face? Do you see anger? Judgment? Sadness? Love?

I want to challenge you to hold that question in tension through the rest of this Lenten season. Carry it with you into Good Friday. How does Jesus look at you from the cross? And then carry that question into the celebration of Easter. How does Jesus look at you on the morning of his resurrection? And as you ponder that question ask yourself what your answer says about what's inside of you, and perhaps, what your countenance reflects to others.

The question isn't whether we're standing in the barn covered with muck. We are. The question isn't whether God knows that we're flawed and faithless. God knows. The question is how we imagine God meeting us right where we are.