



# Simon Peter: Flawed but Faithful Disciple

*“I Will Not Deny You”*

**(based on the book and sermon series by Adam Hamilton)**

Peter, the disciple, is far from perfect. He reacts out of bold courage and then falters. He makes insightful statements of faith, but the next minute, he doesn't understand what Jesus is saying. He is a person we can relate to - a mixture of faith and doubt, strength and weakness.

Our story for this week shows Peter in his weakest, most vulnerable moments. This story comes from the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew's gospel:

**MATTHEW 26:31-35 (NRSV)**

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ <sup>32</sup> But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.” <sup>33</sup> Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”

<sup>35</sup> Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.

This story comes at the end of an eventful day. Jesus is with his disciples to celebrate the Passover. This will be the last time they eat the Seder meal with their Lord. Just as Jesus' disciples are talking about which one of them will be the greatest in Jesus' kingdom, Jesus comes and kneels down and washes their feet - the job of the lowest slave in the household. He tells them that as he has done this for them, they must do this for one another - kneel down and serve.

Jesus predicts his betrayal at the hand of one of his closest friends - one who shares in that Passover meal.

Jesus then predicts that all of his disciples will desert him. Peter boldly vows that he will never desert Jesus. But Jesus knows Peter will deny Jesus not once, but three times - and he tells this to Peter.

When Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, the three disciples he chooses to accompany him fall asleep - even after Jesus asks them to stand watch with him and pray. When he is arrested, Peter grabs a sword and cuts a soldier's ear. But this is not how Jesus means to conquer hatred and fear, and he heals the soldier.

Jesus goes willingly with the soldiers and tells them to leave his disciples alone. They flee, scattering into the night.

Three times Peter will have an opportunity to proclaim his faith in Jesus that night, and three times he will deny even knowing him.

Peter was scared. Scared to death. When we're scared, we do and say things that we don't really mean to say or do. We're responding out of that flight or fight instinct, that self-preservation mode that kicks into high gear when we perceive a danger or threat.

Peter is overcome with remorse and he weeps bitterly.

We can relate to Peter's feelings of remorse, shame and failure - for we too react many times from fear instead of faith. We let that self-preservation instinct kick in and we do and say things we wouldn't ordinarily do or say.

Peter could have let this failure define him. He could have given up and gone home, back to his fishing business. But this is not the end of Peter's story. This failure does not define Peter. It was a place of learning for him.

When we fail, when we deny Jesus through our words or deeds, we too need to remember that this will not define us. God is not done with us just because we make a mistake - or two or three or more. God is in the business of offering us second and third and fourth chances. That's what happened with Peter who goes on to face his fears as he shares the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, as those who believe in Jesus come together to form a new community - the Church - built upon the Rock - Simon Peter, flawed but faithful disciple.

So the next time you find yourself doing or saying something that doesn't reflect your faith in Jesus, remember that God is not finished with you! Remember that there is grace and mercy for you - just as there was for Peter. And learn from what you've done, and grow - that you might be a beacon of Christ's mercy for someone else.