

**I'D NEVER DO THAT! YOU'VE SAID THOSE WORDS. THERE ARE A CHURCH-FULL OF THINGS YOU'D NEVER DO. WOULD YOU EAT A LIVE SCORPION OR SKYDIVE OUT OF AN AIRPLANE WITH A PARACHUTE PACKED BY YOUR ENEMY?**

**YOUR EYES LOOK INTO THE FUTURE AND SEE NO POSSIBILITY OF THAT STUFF. YET, WHAT IF YOU'RE OFFERED A MILLION DOLLARS TO EAT SCORPION TARTARE OR WHAT IF YOU'RE FORCED AT THE THREAT OF DEATH TO SKYDIVE WITH IFFY EQUIPMENT? YOU MIGHT JUST WALK AWAY WITH A BRIEFCASE FULL OF HUNDREDS OR...RUN FOR YOUR LIFE TO AVOID THE ENEMY.**

**THE NIGHT BEFORE JESUS DIES ON A CROSS, HE TELLS HIS DISCIPLES: YOU WILL ALL FALL AWAY WHEN I'M ARRESTED. PETER BLURTS OUT AN OATH: I'LL NEVER LEAVE YOUR SIDE. I'LL FIGHT THEM OFF. I'LL DIE WITH YOU IF NECESSARY!**

**PETER, NOT ONLY WILL YOU RUN; YOU'LL DENY KNOWING ME THREE TIMES BEFORE THE ROOSTER CROWS TWICE. AND THAT, IS EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENS. HE RUNS FOR IT AND ONLY GETS A BRIEFCASE OF TEARS FOR HIS DENIAL.**

**THE DISCIPLES SCATTER LIKE SCORPIONS. THEY TRY TO SAVE THEMSELVES INSTEAD OF STANDING BY THEIR SAVIOR. STILL, JESUS WALKS PURPOSEFULLY TOWARD A CROSS THAT WILL SAVE THEM FROM THEIR DENIAL!**

**PETER DECIDES IT'S TOO RISKY TO DEFEND JESUS BY SWORD OR BY SPEAKING UP FOR HIM; HE JUST WATCHES! WITH HIS EYES ON JESUS, HE DENIES TWICE AND THEN, WHEN A SERVANT GIRL RECOGNIZES HIM, YOU KNOW HIS RESPONSE. THE EYES OF HIS MIND SAW THIS HAPPENING MUCH DIFFERENTLY; HE BETRAYS HIS OATH WITH A NEW OATH: *HONEST TO GOD; I DON'T KNOW THE MAN!***

**IT'S HARD FOR US TO SPEAK UP FOR JESUS. WE FEAR BEING OSTRACIZED FOR OUR ASSOCIATION WITH HIM. WE DON'T MAKE THE EFFORT WHEN PEOPLE PROUDLY BOAST ABOUT IMMORAL, UNGODLY, OR FALSE PHILOSOPHIES. OUR ZEALOUS EYES ARE OFTEN BRAVER THAN OUR FEARFUL HEART!**

**AT OUR CONFIRMATION WE PROMISE TO KEEP OUR FAITH IN CHRIST; THAT WE WILL DIE RATHER THAN DENY JESUS AS OUR SAVIOR. EVERY SUNDAY WE CONFESS OUR FAILURE. OUR EYES LOOK FORWARD AND BELIEVE WE CAN STAND UP FOR JESUS AND THE BIBLE; BUT OUR DENYING EYES BETRAY US.**

**WHAT A RELIEF THAT JESUS WILL NEVER DENY KNOWING US; NEVER DENY THE OPPORTUNITY TO LOVE US; NEVER FAIL TO PLEAD OUR CASE BEFORE HIS FATHER IN HEAVEN. HE KEEPS HIS PROMISE IN SPITE OF OUR FALSE BRAVADO.**

**THREE WEEKS AGO, WE SAW THE CROSS WITH ASHES IN OUR EYES. TWO WEEKS AGO, WE LOOKED AT JESUS THROUGH THE BETRAYING EYES OF JUDAS. LAST WEEK, WE CONFESSED SLEEPY EYES IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE. TONIGHT, WE SHARE THE DENYING EYES OF PETER.**

2 AS THEY HEAD FOR THE MOUNT OF OLIVES, JESUS TELLS THE BOYS THAT THEY'LL ALL FALL AWAY ON ACCOUNT OF HIM. PETER SAYS, *I WILL NEVER BE SCANDALIZED BY YOU*. A SCANDALON IS THE TRIGGER ON A TRAP. JESUS WARNS THAT THEY WILL BE CAUGHT IN A TRAP BECAUSE OF HIM! THE BAIT IN THE TRAP IS THEIR DELUSION OF COURAGE; JESUS IS THE TRIGGER CAUSING THEIR OFFENSE.

HOW DO WE FOLLOW HIM? JESUS UNNERVES US BECAUSE HE GOES TO DEATH WILLINGLY. HE SHAMES US BECAUSE HE HEALS HIS ENEMY HAPPILY. HE FRUSTRATES US BECAUSE HE LOVES EVEN THOSE WHO DENY KNOWING HIM.

JESUS OFFENDS US BECAUSE WE CAN'T DO ANY OF THAT! WE SEE OURSELVES CARRYING A CROSS WITH HIM; BUT, WE DENY HIM WITH EVERY SIN. JESUS QUOTES GOD IN ZECHARIAH: *I WILL STRIKE THE SHEPHERD AND THE SHEEP WILL BE SCATTERED*. THAT'S THE SCANDAL! GOD SACRIFICES HIS SON! HIS SON SACRIFICES HIMSELF FOR US! GOD'S RIDICULOUS GRACE OFFENDS US!

HIS GRACE IMPLIES WE'RE NOT GOOD ENOUGH AS WE ARE, AND THAT WE CAN'T DO WHAT'S RIGHT OR EVEN MAKE IT RIGHT! SO, WE SET OUR EYES ON PROVING WE DON'T NEED GRACE; WE CAN LOVE AND DEFEND HIM, DIE FOR HIM; AND THEN, WE END UP ACTING LIKE WE DON'T EVEN KNOW HIM... DOUBLE DENIAL!

OUR PROUD SPOKESMAN, PETER, SEES HIMSELF AS ZEALOUS. EVEN CHRIST'S WORDS OF A ROOSTER CAN'T PHASE HIM. IT'S THE SAME STORY SINCE EDEN - GOD SAYS, *DON'T DO THIS*, AND WE SAY, *I'D NEVER DO THAT!* THEN, WE DO.

WHEN TEARS OF CONTRITION CLOUD OUR DENYING EYES, WE'RE READY FOR GRACE. JESUS BAPTIZES US INTO HIS CROSS, AND WE FIND PEACE IN HUMILITY RATHER THAN SEEKING GLORY IN OUR ZEAL.

YOU KNOW THE SONG, 'LYIN' EYES,' BY THE EAGLES. *THERE AIN'T NO WAY TO HIDE YOUR LYIN' EYES*. YOU CAN TRY TO DISGUISE YOUR SINFUL FEAR OF PEER PRESSURE WITH YOUR NOSE IN THE AIR; BUT, THERE AIN'T NO WAY TO HIDE DENYING EYES. YOUR SILENCE GIVES YOU AWAY.

KEEPING YOUR VOWS TO GOD IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE. LIKE PETER AND THE APOSTLES, YOU GET BLINDED BY YOUR OWN DELUSIONS; YOU LIE TO YOURSELF, AS WELL AS TO GOD. THAT'S WHY YOU NEED JESUS TO BE ARRESTED AND TRIED IN YOUR PLACE. SOMEONE HAS TO PAY FOR YOUR SIN!

WITH THE ASHES OF DEATH AND BETRAYAL, SLEEPINESS AND DENIAL IN YOUR EYES, YOU HAVE TO COUNT ON CHRIST. WITH FAITHFUL, ALERT, BLOODIED EYES, HE LOOKS WITH COMPASSION ON YOU.

IT HAS TO BE THIS WAY: HE HAS TO BE THE LAST ONE STANDING, THE ONLY ONE MAKING THE GOOD CONFESSION. HE IS THE ONE WHO NEVER DENIES THE WILL OF HIS FATHER BUT HUMBLY SUBMITS TO SUFFERING AND DEATH, FOR YOU.

HE EATS THE SCORPIONS THAT YOU CANNOT; HE JUMPS OUT OF THE PLANE WITH THE ENEMY'S PARACHUTE...FOR YOU!

3 JESUS IS SENTENCED TO THE DUST BY HIS FATHER IN ORDER TO RAISE YOU UP TO HEAVEN. HIS DAD HANDS HIM OVER TO THE ENEMY. JESUS DRINKS THE CUP OF HIS FATHER'S WRATH. A SINLESS SON IS THE ONLY HOPE FOR SINNERS.

NO ONE SAYS IT BETTER THAN ISAIAH: SURELY HE BEARS OUR GRIEF AND CARRIES OUR SORROW; WE SEE HIM STRICKEN - SMITTEN BY GOD, AND AFFLICTED. HE IS PIERCED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS; HE IS CRUSHED FOR OUR INIQUITIES; UPON HIM IS THE CHASTISEMENT THAT BRINGS US PEACE, AND BY HIS WOUNDS WE ARE HEALED. ...I WILL STRIKE THE SHEPHERD.

THOUGH THE BOYS RAN AND PETER DENIED, JESUS SAYS: AFTER I AM RAISED UP, I WILL GO BEFORE YOU TO GALILEE. HE PROMISES TO BEAT DEATH AND MEET WITH THEM SO HIS SAVING WORK CAN GO ON. HIS RESURRECTION PROVES THAT WE CAN CONFESS OUR DENYING EYES AND LOOK IN FAITH TO OUR RESURRECTION!

JESUS ENTRUSTS THE TEACHING AND BAPTIZING OF ALL NATIONS TO THOSE DENYING AND DOUBTING DISCIPLES. HE SENDS THE HOLY SPIRIT TO ENLIGHTEN AND ENCOURAGE THEM, SO A DENIER LIKE YOU CAN BELIEVE AND CONFESS GRACE.

PETER'S BROKENNESS, TEARS, AND SHAME ARE A GOOD EXAMPLE FOR YOU. YOUR EYES OF FLESH TELL YOU THAT YOU'RE NOT THAT BAD - YOU'D NEVER DO THAT! ...WRONG! YOU ARE OFFENSIVE EVERY TIME YOUR SINNER SHOWS. EVERY TIME YOU HIDE YOUR FAITH YOU MIGHT AS WELL DENY KNOWING JESUS.

PETER'S IN THE PERFECT PLACE TO UNDERSTAND GRACE AS JESUS APPEARS TO THE APOSTLES, SHOWS THEM HIS HANDS, AND SPEAKS HIS PARDON: PEACE BE WITH YOU. YOU ARE IN THE PERFECT PLACE AS HE COMES HERE TO GIVE YOU HIS PEACE THROUGH HIS WORD, SUPPER AND BAPTISMAL PARDON.

LATER, IN GALILEE, PETER GETS A SPECIAL SINGLING-OUT THAT LEAVES NO DOUBT HE'S RESTORED FROM DENIER TO CONFESSOR. JESUS GIVES PETER A THREEFOLD COMMISSIONING. HIS THREE, FEED MY SHEEP NEGATES PETER'S THREEFOLD DENIAL. YOU HAVE THE SAME THREEFOLD ABSOLUTION IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT!

NEVER GIVE UP ON YOURSELF NO MATTER HOW OBVIOUS YOUR DENYING EYES PROVE TO BE. YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN WILL NOT ABANDON YOU BECAUSE HE ALREADY ABANDONED JESUS IN YOUR PLACE. TIMOTHY SAYS THAT GOD ALWAYS REMAINS FAITHFUL BECAUSE HE CANNOT DENY HIMSELF. HE IS A GRACIOUS GOD, READY TO FORGIVE YOUR FAITHLESSNESS. COUNT ON IT!

LUKE TELLS US THAT JESUS LOOKS DIRECTLY INTO PETER'S EYES WHEN THE ROOSTER CROWS A SECOND TIME. YOU KNOW IT ISN'T WITH CONTEMPT; BUT WITH COMPASSION FOR THE LOVABLE LUG.

LET CHRIST'S FAITHFUL, COMPASSIONATE EYES FIND YOU TONIGHT SO YOU CAN REPENT OF YOUR COWARDLY DENIAL OF HIM, AND LOOK FULL INTO HIS FACE WITH THANKFUL, TRUSTING EYES.

YOU ARE SO LOVED. LIVE LIFE LOVED! AMEN