

I Never Knew the Man



While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.' 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. And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, 'This man is one of them.' 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.' But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, 'I do not know this man you are talking about.'

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. (Mark 14:66-72)

Imagine the scene. Having lurked in the shadows, Peter, cold from the night air, steps into the fire's light to warm himself, and a servant girl, diminutive in size by comparison with Peter, challenges him: *You also were with Jesus*. He denies it. Then again, the servant girl comments to all around them: *This man is one of them*, and a second time Peter denies it. Some in the crowd then pick up the accusation and once again he denies the association, but this time with an oath—*As God is my witness, 'I do not know the man you are talking about'*—and the cock crowed a third time, and something within Peter died.

While Peter denied knowing *the man*, he came to know a man within himself that he never dreamed lived there. This wasn't him. This wasn't what he was about. He had pledged his all to Jesus, pledged to protect him and swore to die with him if need be. That same other person lives within each of us—our baser side, the side shaped by our fears. Often we only become aware of it in the moment of our own surprising failure. "How could I have done that? How could I have said that?" Whatever it may be, it is so out of character that we are as surprised, or more so, than those around us. Yet, as we will discover, even this did not disqualify Peter from loving and following Jesus.

Prayer

O break, O break, hard heart of mine! Thy weak self-love and guilty pride His Pilate and His Judas were: Jesus, our Lord, is crucified.

Henry W. Faber, 1849