



SERMON RECAP

MARCH 8, 2026

**Third Sunday of Lent
“I don’t know the man”
Matthew 26:57-75**

There is a site in Jerusalem that forever links the two men from today’s passage. In this reading we learn of Caiaphas and his trial with Jesus and Peter’s denial that he even knows the man. Caiaphas is the High Priest who questions Jesus. Trying to find a reason to convict him, Caiaphas is frustrated and outraged. Above all however, he is afraid.

Peter, arguably Jesus’ closest friend and most loyal disciple, is watching nearby. When confronted by strangers, he denies he knows Jesus. He is asked three times, and each time the denial ratchets up a level until Matthew tells us that Peter cursed Jesus. At that moment, the rooster called, Peter remembered Jesus’ words at their Passover meal, and Peter wept.

Fear drove both Caiaphas and Peter that night, and they will forever be linked by the Church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu. Gallicantu is a Latin word that means literally “rooster crows.” It is a church built upon the site that is thought to be Caiaphas’ home. The picture above shows the exterior of the church, which is adorned with several artistic mosaics depicting the story from today’s reading. Atop the dome of the church is a cross with a rooster on it.

Inside, there are ruins of Caiaphas’s courtyard, and in the interior is a chamber that is thought to be a first century prison cell. While historic sites such as this should always be taken with a grain of salt, there is a plausible chance that Jesus himself was held in that cell, lowered by chains after meeting with Caiaphas and awaiting his “trial” with Pilate in the morning.



A Breath Prayer

INHALE:

Denied in fear

EXHALE:

Rising in courage.

It is a church built on the ruins of fear, and it rises as a testament to redemption. Both men had very real reasons to fear. Caiaphas was fearful that Jesus could disrupt the city. He was afraid of losing his esteemed status. He was afraid of the might of Rome, and their enforcement of the Pax Romans. In the Gospel of John he gives voice to that fear saying, “It is better that one man die for the people rather than the whole nation be destroyed.”

Peter feared for good reason as well. He was watching his rabbi be mocked and beaten. He could tell the trial was a sham. He must have seen that Jesus was heading toward crucifixion because the decision had already been made. As his disciple, he could be questioned. Worse, he could be implicated.

Caiaphas had institutional fear. It is fear that we have seen play out in churches for centuries. During the Civil Rights movement, churches were afraid to speak. In the face of LGBTQ oppression, churches were afraid to change. As women took leadership roles, powerful people in churches were afraid to cede their voice. As Christian Nationalism rises in the United States, still too many churches are afraid to resist. When institutions fear justice, people suffer.

Peter had personal fear. When people fear, they do things they wouldn’t otherwise do. His fearful reaction did not reveal his true character. Sometimes fear causes us to fail, but failure gives us a chance to respond.

The fearful responses of that night led to the death of Jesus. Would a different response from Peter changed that? Probably not, but his fear was not the end of the story. Fear caused him to fail, but faith helped him rise again.

Pushed by fear, we all fail some times, but the failure of our past does not have to define our future. How we respond to failure matters. How we rise in faith is what defines us. Peter’s failure was not the end of his story. He was able to rise. A entire church stands as a testament to his response.

You do not have to dwell on your failures. You are not defined by the fearful moments. In faith, like Peter, you can rise again. Together we can build a church that doesn’t fail in fear, but rises in faith.

NEXT WEEK:

“Judas, Pilate, and Barabbas” Matthew 27:1-26