

The room was dark, giving it a gloomy feeling. We were gathered for a meal on the eve of Passover. Because the Lord was quietly pensive, we ate in silence. During supper, he stood, removed his robe and tied a towel around his waist like a servant. He poured water into a clay basin and began to wash the feet of each of us, drying them with the towel. "This is slave's work," I thought. I couldn't imagine the Lord, the One we believed to be the Messiah, doing the work of a common slave.



When he knelt at my feet, I asked, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet, too?"

He said, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

I said firmly, "You will never wash my feet."

The Lord's tone matched mine: "Unless I wash you, you will have no future with me."

"Then wash not only my feet, but my whole body," I said.

After washing my feet, the Lord said, "Not all of you are clean." I was perplexed by this.

He continued teaching, as he often did after performing a sign, "If I, your Lord and Master, wash your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. I have done this as an example for you."

At the time I thought, "How strange to tell us to wash one another's feet." Later I realized that he was not talking about foot washing, but about love. We were to follow his example and lovingly serve one another. As with everything the Lord did, foot washing pointed to a deeper truth.

After the foot washing we gathered around the table for supper. The Lord's face darkened with an expression I had never seen. He looked deeply distressed, as if in pain.

"I tell you truly, one of you will betray me," he said. I glanced at Andrew whose expression was a mixture of horror and sadness. "Who could he mean?" I thought. I turned to John, who was sitting next to Jesus, and whispered, "Ask him who he means."

John asked and the Lord said, "The one to whom I'm giving this piece of bread dipped in the dish." He handed the bread to Judas and said, "Do quickly what you must."

We thought Judas was simply leaving to buy more food. He was the treasurer and often left a meal early to buy food for the next day.

With Judas gone in the darkness of night, the Lord continued teaching, "Children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, but where I am going, you cannot come."

Immediately I asked, "Lord, where are you going?"

He said, "You cannot follow me now where I am going, but you will follow afterward."

I was confused and afraid as I said, "Lord why can't I follow you now? I would lay down my life for you."

Shaking his head slowly from side to side, he answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? In truth, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times."

The mystery of where Judas went was soon solved. After supper, we went with the Lord across the Kidron valley to a garden where he liked to pray. While we were praying, Judas emerged from the shadows leading a group made up of Roman soldiers, chief priests' guards, and some Pharisees.

The Lord turned and asked, "Whom are you looking for?"

They replied, "Jesus of Nazareth."

When the Lord said, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. He asked them a second time whom were they seeking. Their answer was the same. "You have found me. Now, let these men go," he said.

I couldn't allow the Lord to be arrested without a fight. I drew a sword from under my cloak and slashed at the man who was about to seize the Lord, cutting off his ear. The Lord rebuked me saying, "Put your sword away. Would you prevent me from drinking the cup the Father has given me?" Stung by these words, I stood frozen in place while they bound him. John violently jerked my arm and we ran for our lives.

We fled in terror and confusion, having no idea where the others went. When we realized the soldiers hadn't pursued us, we retraced our steps and followed the Lord and his arresters. They took him into Jerusalem to Annas, who shared the office of high priest with his father-in-law, Caiaphas.

John was admitted into the courtyard, since he was known to Annas. I remained outside the gate, crouching in the shadows, afraid of being recognized as a follower of Jesus. A short time later John came out and called, "Peter, where are you?" I emerged from hiding and followed.

As we passed a woman standing by the gate, she said, "Aren't you also one of Jesus' disciples?" I disagreed firmly saying, "I am not."

I disappeared into the crowd gathered in the courtyard, joining those huddled around a large fire in the cold dawn. I listened for news of what was happening to the Lord. Someone said that Annas was questioning him.

While warming myself by the fire, one of the temple police who had been at the arrest looked at me intently. I turned my face away. He said, "Aren't you also one of his disciples?" I answered, "I am not."

As I worked my way to the edge of the crowd, one of the slaves of the high priest who was also at the Lord's arrest said, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" I denied it vehemently by saying, "I was never there." No sooner had the words escaped, a cock crowed.

*What have I done? I thought. How could I deny my Lord? How could the words of betrayal have been spoken by my lips? I didn't believe I was capable of such a cowardly act. But, in the end, I denied him.*

I was devastated by the cowardice of my denials. I, who had sworn allegiance to the death, had crumbled in fear. The “rock” had been crushed; terror had triumphed over loyalty.

The Lord was crucified that same day. I didn't watch . . . I couldn't watch. I was no longer Peter the Rock. In shame, I confessed my new name: Peter the Denier.