

Mark 14:27-31, 66-72; 16:1-8¹
Christ's Perfect Love for Imperfect People

Introduction

A group of medical students were visiting a mental hospital. As they were walking past, a man cried out from one room: "Mimi! Mimi!"

One student asked the guide: "Why is he crying for Mimi?"

The reply: "Mimi loved him but later jilted him."

As they walked further down, a second man cried out from another room: "Mimi! Mimi!"

The same student asked again: "Why is he also crying for Mimi?"

The reply: "Mimi loved him but later jilted him too."

Then the group entered the innermost part of the mental hospital where the most seriously-ill patients were housed. A man there screamed as he saw them: "No ... Mimi! No ... Mimi!"

The student asked: "Now, what did Mimi do to his poor fellow?"

The reply: "Mimi loved him and later married him ... and he becomes like this."

The point is this: If we don't get human love, we can go crazy with pain and hurt. But if we do get it, it may turn out to be even more painful and hurtful. Why? It is because human love is imperfect.

Today, I want to share with you a certain kind of love—a love that comes from Jesus Christ to us. It is His perfect love for imperfect people like you and me. It is a kind of perfect love that will love those who have made mistakes, even serious mistakes in life.

If we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we all have made some mistakes and done some wrongs from time to time. No matter what the nature of that mistake or wrong is, the fact is that committing mistakes or wrongs is part of being human.

¹ 1984 NIV

Today, we examine three scenes in the Bible to help us appreciate Christ's perfect love for imperfect people.

I. Scene I—Mark 14:27-31

27 “You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’”

28 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

29 Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.”

30 “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”

31 But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.

This was the night when Christ was to be arrested by His enemies. He was with His disciples, and He warned them: “You will all scatter away” (v. 27).

Among Christ's disciples was a man called Peter. He protested: “Even if all the others are to fall away from you, I will not” (v. 29).

Christ said to him: “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times” (v. 30).

Peter protested even more: “I will stick to you even if it means I have to die for it” (v. 31).

What was Peter's problem? It was not insincerity. He meant what he said, at least at that point in time. Peter's problem was really one of overconfidence in his own self. It is good to be confident of oneself. Peter was confident of himself—of his own devotion and loyalty to Christ. However, he trusted in himself more than he should. He did not know who he really was. He believed too much in himself. He overestimated his own abilities. He thought he was not like the others. They might fail, but he would not because he thought he was stronger.

When someone today begins to think and act like Peter, do you know what will he be tempted to do? Well, he will begin to temper with those forbidden boundaries in life—in his business relationships, in his social relationships, and in his marital relationship. He may then fall into temptations and fail in those relationships. But we must never deceive ourselves to think that we are too

strong to have any weakness. The reality of our human imperfection implies that we can never rely absolutely on our own strength.

Peter deceived himself to think that he was unlike the other disciples. He was Christ's top disciple. Without doubt, he must be better and stronger than them.

Peter's problem was that of overconfidence—trusting too much in his own self—and this can also be our problem today.

We now move on to the next scene to see how Peter's overconfidence brought about a painful failure on his part.

II. Scene II—Mark 14:66-72

66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by.

67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said.

68 But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.

69 When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them."

70 Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."

71 He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Christ was now arrested and brought to the place where He would be questioned by His enemies. Peter had secretly sneaked into the courtyard to see what these people would do to Christ.

He was immediately recognized by a servant girl as one who was with Christ. You know what Peter said? He said: "I neither know nor understand what you are saying" (v. 68). You know what that means? It means that Peter denied knowing Christ. You can imagine cold sweat dripping down his forehead as he uttered

those words. And Peter at one time was so sure that he was brave enough to stick with Christ unto death.

Insistently, the servant girl said again to some bystanders: "This is one of them" (v. 69). Peter denied a second time.

A little later, the bystanders said to Peter: "Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it" (v. 70). Now in total panic, Peter began to curse and swear, saying: "I do not know this man of whom you speak" (v. 71).

Well, here was Peter who thought that he was devoted and brave enough to stick with Christ even unto death. But now, he was denying Christ for fear of his life. He denied knowing Christ not once, not twice, but three times.

The Bible tells that just as the fearful Peter denied knowing Christ the third time, the rooster crowed a second time. There and then, Peter remembered the words of Christ to him: "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times" (v. 72). And Peter must also have remembered his own words to Christ: "If I have to die with you, I will not deny you" (v. 31).

And Peter wept his heart out at that instance. Why? It is because he began to take stock of himself. He realized that he was not unlike the others. In fact, he was even worse than them for he denied Christ three times loud and clear. He was not stronger than the others. In reality, he was weak, really weak.

Peter lived some 2000 years ago. But lest you think that Peter's overconfidence in his own self is a problem with people in the ancient past, and has nothing to do with us today, here's a true story (*The Straits Times*, 15 Feb 2003, p. H7).

A young Singaporean professional was once entrusted with his clients' money. But he withdrew money without the permission of his clients. He used the money for his own personal ventures and got into financial difficulties. He was later made a bankrupt. He tried to return all the money, but still had to use a substantial sum to settle his personal debts.

He had opportunity to flee Singapore. However, he chose not to. Instead, he surrendered himself to the police, along with his passport and evidence of his crimes. He pleaded guilty to four charges of criminal breach of trust in court.

At the end of his trial, the judge sentenced him to jail for 4 ½ years. In self-mitigation, this man told the judge: "I committed the crimes not because I am greedy, but because I am desperate."

Well, what does this smart Singaporean professional of today share in common with Peter, the Jewish disciple who lived some 2000 years ago? They share the problem of overconfidence in themselves. Peter said: “I am not like the other disciples. I will stick with Christ even unto death.” The Singaporean man said: “I am not greedy like other people. I will not embezzle money no matter how desperate I am.”

But in both instances, there’s something positive. Peter took stock of who he was, and he wept bitterly in remorse. The Singaporean man also took stock of who he was, and he surrendered himself in remorse.

What do these two people tell us today? They tell us that the basic human problem is still the same today as it was so many years ago. The basic human problem of believing and trusting too much in ourselves is still here today as it was so many years ago.

In other words, this story of Peter is not an old-fashioned tale. It is also the story of many people today. It can be your story and my story because we are all human beings.

Yes, we need to do what we should. Even more importantly, we need God to help us do what we should. Indeed, in our human weakness, we find strength in the Lord when we acknowledge our need of Him.

We live in a world with little or no tolerance for errors. One try, one mistake, and you are out. Peter denied Christ three times. If Peter is to live in our time today, I think his three denials are enough to condemn him forever.

But Peter’s three denials did not signal the end of Christ’s love for him because he found a new beginning.

Let me lead you to the third scene to capture this.

III. Scene III—Mark 16:1-8

1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body.

2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb

3 and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”

4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

6 “Don't be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

This scene brings us to the place where Christ was buried after He died on the Cross. It was three days after His death. Some women came to this place early in the morning. They had come to honour Christ's body according to the customs of that time.

They saw that the huge stone at the entrance of the tomb was rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they would be even more amazed. A man in white robe (an angel) said to them: “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here” (v. 6).

Now, note what this angel continued to say: “But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you” (v. 7). What had Christ said to them? Well, earlier Christ had said to them of sheep being scattered when the shepherd was struck, and He would go before them to Galilee after He had been raised (Mk 14:27-28). Of course these were strange words to the disciples then and they didn't understand.

What I want you to give special attention here is that the angel told the women to go tell it to the disciples AND Peter. You notice that the angel specifically named Peter here. Do you know the significance of this?

The specific mention of Peter here is important because of what he had gone through. At this time, Peter probably saw himself as the MOST disloyal of Christ's disciples; the WORST failure of all time.

So, this message of the risen Christ who was going to meet up with His disciples AND Peter was especially important to Peter. This meeting with Peter and the

others in this place called Galilee was no ordinary meeting. It was to be like a wonderful reunion between the Shepherd (Christ) and His sheep (Peter and the others). It is as if through the mouths of those women who were at the tomb, Christ wanted to say to His disciples, especially Peter, this: "You may have messed things up quite badly. But in spite of your failure, go to Galilee and meet me there. You are still my sheep. I as your shepherd still love you and want to see you again." We can conclude that Christ had chosen to forgive them for their desertion and denials of Him.

Yes, the call to the disciples AND Peter to meet the risen Christ in Galilee is the Good News for us this day. Just as Peter was forgiven by Christ because he had wept tears of repentance for his wrongdoing, we are offered today divine forgiveness if we accept Christ as the Shepherd of our lives in spite of all our imperfections.

You and I may have committed many misdeeds and failed many times in life. But that's not the end for us. There's still hope if we learn from our misdeeds and failures. More importantly, today we learn that there's hope of divine forgiveness if we accept Christ as our Shepherd in life.

Some people may think that what Peter did is not likely to be our problem today. For one thing, people are supposedly smarter today. They may make mistakes, but they do not make the same mistake three times like Peter. But hear this story of a real tragedy (*Sunday Times*, 16 Feb 2003, p. 6).

David and Clara Harris ran their husband-and-wife dental practice in Houston, Texas. Things seemed to be going fine until David began an affair with his receptionist. Clara discovered it and tried to get back her husband.

One morning, Clara was suspicious that her husband was still holding on to his extra-marital affair. She trailed him in her car and followed him to a hotel where she eventually found him and his lover holding hands.

Enraged, Clara repeatedly struck the other woman until her husband threw her to the ground. He then told Clara that their marriage was over, and went to the parking lot with his lover.

Clara then went into her car. She then turned the car towards David and stepped on the accelerator. The car knocked down the man and ran heavily over him.

Clara circled the parking lot again, and ran her car over David's body a second time. Never make the same mistake three times? Not so for Clara.

For a third time, she circled her car and ran it over David's now lifeless body yet again.

Clara Harris was charged in court. She was eventually fined US\$10,000 and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment. In a moment of impulsiveness, one woman committed the same misdeed three times, and had to live with the consequences.

Some 2000 years ago, Peter denied Jesus three times and had to bear with some consequences. The human problem then is also our problem today.

But you know what was most heartening about Clara Harris's situation? Her father-in-law had testified in her favour in court. The older man said: "We feel like a member of our family has erred but we forgive that."

One day some 2000 years ago, Christ reassured a man utterly disappointed with himself with these words: "Peter, you have erred in denying me. But in my grace, I forgive you, I love you, and I still want to use you again. Go and meet me in Galilee."

The risen Christ is still forgiving and loving imperfect people today just as He had done so in Peter's time.

Conclusion

Today, we have heard that Christ forgives imperfect people in His perfect love. It means He is willing to accept us, beginning just as we are with all our imperfections. If you are honest with yourselves, you have to admit that you do commit misdeeds and fail from time to time. But your misdeeds and failures need not bring you to the end of the road. Christ offers you His invitation to forgive and accept you. By His grace, you can have a new beginning in life.

On that 1st Resurrection Sunday (that 1st Easter Sunday), the risen Christ told the women at the empty tomb through an angel: "Tell my disciples AND Peter to go and meet me in Galilee."

Today, the risen Christ is also calling us to come and meet Him. Would you come and meet Him today?

- If you are not yet a believer, and you sense Christ calling you to come and meet Him in a personal way, and you want to know how you can do that, I encourage you to talk with a Christian you know and whose life has impacted you. I am sure he/she will be most happy to help you.

- If you are a believer, and you want to commit yourself afresh to Christ this day, I want to give you some time to commune with Him in the quietness of your own heart—come and meet Him, confess and receive His forgiveness, trust more in Him and less in yourself, and be reassured of His perfect love for you in spite of your imperfections.

AMEN!