

*“You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”*

*Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.” “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.” But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same. — Mark 14:27-31*

This Maundy Thursday, when we celebrate the Last Supper, we get another of those uncomfortable texts of the bible. I’ve always thought that I would happily die for Jesus. I’ve imagined scenarios throughout my life where it was “deny Jesus or die”, and of course I would die first. I bet Peter, for whom this choice was far more possible than for me, thought the same thing. I bet many solid Christians have believed this.

Yet Peter, the chief disciple, Jesus’ “right hand man”, was wrong. Though he proclaims here, “even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you,” he is wrong. Given the actual chance to die for Jesus, He instead denies even knowing Him. Most likely just as you and I would.

Many experts believe that the Gospel of Mark is really a collection of Peter’s own recollections. So if Peter in essence wrote Mark, then he’s the one who chose to share this story of Jesus’ prediction of his denial, and later, that very denial Jesus predicted. He didn’t share the story of his reinstatement on the beach (that’s in John 21), and didn’t share that he was the one who ran to the tomb after the women told the disciples Jesus was risen (that’s in Luke 24). Peter wasn’t interested in rescuing his own reputation, but rather in showing us that even the most sincere and brave of us might deny our Lord when death is on the line.

As I’ve been thinking about how to help during this pandemic, I’ve had to face this question to a small degree. Do I go help deliver food to those in need and risk bringing the virus home to my family? And I have to say that I’ve had a hard time with this. Some of it is my fear for my family, which is right. But some, I have to admit, is a fear for myself. Like Peter, when illness, danger, or death is on the line, it’s hard to follow Jesus.

The disciples missed the most important part of this whole passage. Jesus didn’t just predict their denial and flight to safety. Did you notice what else he predicted? “But after I have risen...” Jesus just told them not only that He would die, not only that the disciples would run away, but that He would rise from the dead! And not one disciples mentions it.

Do you believe that you would die for Jesus?

Are you humble enough to admit the times you’ve not followed Him?

Are you maybe missing the main point of Jesus’ message for fear of the consequences of following Him?