

I think that I mentioned last week that I am excited about the Olympics... and being able to watch some of it in a few weeks... just as I do every **two** years. ... (Yes... I said that **right**... because now that they have staggered the summer and the winter Olympics so that we get one or the other... every **two** years.) ... And I still end up completely **raptured** by them... even though I can be very **cynical** about some of the international judging of the events.

During the 2002 **Winter** Olympics in Salt Lake City... the incredible article that I am about to read... appeared in the New York Times. Its author is Selena Roberts:

About 10 yards past a security checkpoint along the path of a cinder-block hall inside the Salt Lake Ice Center, a panel of nine judges filtered into a room for a standard post-competition meeting last Tuesday morning. Twelve hours removed from the controversial moment when gold medallions were draped over Russia's Yelena Berezhnaya and Anton Sikharulidze instead of Canada's Jamie Salé and David Pelletier, the judges assembled for a review of the decision under Ron Pfenning, the head referee.

At first, it was business as usual as the judges sat around a table, pouring over marks for several skaters, according to two high-ranking figure skating officials who spoke Friday on condition of anonymity. The judges debated the scores for various pairs, including those of the Americans Kyoko Ina and John Zimmerman. Watching a video of their long program, judges argued over why Ina and Zimmerman finished fifth and not fourth. It was all normal give-and-take, according to the officials.

Then the meeting took a bizarre turn. Pfenning, known as a gentle and meticulous caretaker of skating, handed each judge a piece of paper with a passage about honesty and integrity, officials said.

As each person passed back the pieces of paper, the judge Marie-Reine Le Gougne began to sob, officials said.

"It was a rambling avalanche of words," Pfenning said when reached by telephone. "I hadn't asked her a question. She had been teary-eyed through a lot of the meeting. It was an outburst: 'You don't understand. You don't understand. We're under an awful lot of pressure. My federations, my president Didier, I had to put the Russians first.'"

Didier Gailhaguet is the president of the French Figure Skating Federation. Pfenning said that when Le Gougne called out Gailhaguet's name, he knew he had to report the incident to the International Skating Union. "I never gave it a second thought," Pfenning said.

For several minutes, the wail from Le Gougne grew so loud, one official said, that a person in the room stripped tape over the crack in the door in an apparent soundproofing effort.

The two high-ranking skating officials said no one embraced Le Gougne, the stylish 40-year-old Frenchwoman, as she cried out. Many of the judges, officials said, saw her as a pathetic figure. Some had seen her crying in the same way while standing in the hotel lobby after the competition. They already knew why Le Gougne was distraught, they said: her conscience had caught up to her.

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt enormous peer pressure... to do something you knew was wrong...? ... Has there ever been a time... when you lacked enough courage... and caved-in... in order to avoid losing friendships or popularity...? ... HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TEMPTED TO DENY YOU ARE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS?

If you ever have... then today I have a message of hope for you... from the life of Peter. ... Peter caved ! He blew it big time. ... How could he have gone so quickly from courageously lashing out with a sword to keep Jesus from being arrested... (as we saw in last week's passage) ... to **four** vehement denials (as we will see in this weeks passage) ? ... And, yes... once again I did mean to use that number. I **did** mean to say four denials.

Perhaps you have found yourself in situations... where it seemed **better** for your health... maybe you like having all of your teeth... or your nose straight and not re-arranged on your face... and you could keep it that way... if you just kept quiet or even recanted your relationship to Christ.

Well, beginning with Peter... who gave in to the temptation to deny Jesus as his Lord and Messiah at Jesus' trial... the disciples of Jesus Christ... over the centuries... have indeed been tempted to deny Him. ...The circumstances vary... from the extreme of being tortured in prison... to the daily pressure to deny Christ while in line at the store... because of the fear of rejection. ... I don't think that I am going very far out on a limb by saying: *"The temptation to deny Jesus sits outside the heart of **each one** of us looking for an opportunity to be invited in..."* ... (Am I right?)

But here is the gist of our encouragement from today's passage. Jesus clearly **understood** this temptation... It is a manifestation of trying to live our Christianity in **our own** strength... with our fleshly strength... Jesus warned His disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, *"Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation [ultimately, to deny Me]; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Matthew 26:41).

This fire of temptation in Peter was first lit by his boastful **pride**... and the pride from the other disciples... who bragged that they would never leave or forsake Jesus... but would willingly go to prison and die with Him. Peter **must** have meant it... and he showed that he **did** when he stepped up to the mob of an estimated six hundred men with clubs and swords... and

sliced off Malcus' ear. But this was all done in Peter's **own** strength... it was his **wrongful** idea that Jesus had to be protected by him... in order for Christ's kingdom to come about. ... His impulsive action was probably brought on by the sense that Peter thought it was all up to **him**... or else it would be the end of Christ's ministry.

Someone who believes that the full weight of ministry is dependent on **themselves**... that ministry cannot... or will not move forward... unless **they** do something... has set themselves up for a major fall – just like Peter's complete denial of Christ.

Today... when we have in any given church 20% of the people doing 80% of the work... it is very easy to feel this way. ... *"We won't have an AWANA program unless I step in as a leader this year..."* But that is not the way that God calls us to the work of ministry. He calls us with far more of a sense that He **wants** us there – not *"no one else will, so I might as well..."* ... I think every member of our church needs to be involved in ministry... if you're not... then you are robbing this church and God Who has gifted you in certain ways. ... But please... do not assume any role of ministry from a sense that it **all** lays on your shoulders... that ministry will not happen unless **you** step in.

In Matthew 26:39... the Lord had prayed in the garden of Gethsemane: *"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."* Then He rose up... awakened His disciples... and warned them for the **second** time... to keep watching and praying that they might not enter into temptation.

From where he had stood in the garden on the side of the Mount of Olives, there is little doubt that He could see the torches of this large mob (about 600 men) ... and said, "*Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!*" (26:45-46).

Then the Lord chided the religious leaders for the way they came to arrest Him as if He were some robber. ... My goodness... why hadn't they simply arrested Him in the temple area... where He had been every day since Palm Sunday? ... But this was the hour that the Son of Man was going as it had been determined. ... Jesus would set aside His life voluntarily... die for the sins of mankind in just this way. ... These events were not just blind circumstances... they had all been planned before the foundation of the world. ... Even to the point... that all the disciples left Him and fled... ... because they had not prayed.

This is where our passage for today picks up.

According to John 18:13-24... our Lord was taken to the house of the **former** high priest, Annas. ... Annas was viewed by the Jewish people as the **true** High Priest... and were not yet ready to regard the Roman appointee to this position... whose name was Caiaphas. Caiaphas met all the requirements for being High Priest... and he was the son-in-law of Annas... but the fact that Rome made the decision for them... that Caiaphas would be their new High Priest... did not make it a settled matter in the minds of many Jews. ... So Jesus first goes to Annas... the symbolic High Priest.

Now... Peter... still trying to keep his word in the power of his flesh... circled back out of the darkness - with John... and both of them began to follow Jesus and the crowd into the courtyard of Annas.

Luke 22:54-62

You may recall... that after the Passover meal was finished... Jesus had told Peter and the other disciples... that Satan had demanded permission to sift them like wheat... Jesus said...

Luke 22:32-34 (ESV)

but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”

Apparently this was not the only time... that Peter made his boastful claim... and Jesus warned him about the rooster . Later... the very same evening... in the garden of Gethsemane according to Matthew 26:31-35... Jesus had told the disciples that they would all fall away - when the Shepherd was struck down. ... Peter in similar fashion of the flesh responded, *"Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away."* Jesus had then warned, *"Truly I say to you that this very night, before a cock crows, you shall deny Me three times."* ... And Peter, like a proud, strident rooster himself, said, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." All the other disciples said the same thing.

John relates in his gospel... that a slave girl in the house of Annas first asked Peter if he was a disciple of Jesus... and he answered, *"I am not"* (John 18:13-24). ...When Jesus was taken to the courtyard of Caiaphas...

the Roman appointed high priest... Peter followed them... found some men sitting around a charcoal fire... and joined them. ... Peter was entrenched deeply in enemy territory. He was surrounded by servants and people loyal to the High Priest.

While he was sitting in the warmth and security of the fire... another slave girl saw his face in the glow of the firelight and said, "*This man was with him, too.*" But he denied it saying, "*Woman, I do not know him*".

Then Peter moved away from the courtyard fire and walked out onto the porch (according to Mark 14:68). ... At that point a maid saw him (maybe... it could have been... the same girl once more)... and while **Jesus** was being accused **inside**... she accused Peter of being one of them... out on the porch in front of the bystanders, "*You are one of them, too!*" But Peter said to the men standing around, "*Man, I am not!*"

Perhaps an hour passed... and while Jesus was still being questioned by the Sanhedrin at the "official" high priest's home... Peter was approached for the fourth time by a man who would not have forgotten who Peter was-- he was a relative of Malchus... the slave whose ear Peter had cut off... and Jesus had healed. ... So he questioned Peter, "*Did I not see you in the garden with him?*" (John 18:26). ...Then turning to the other men he announced their surprise guest... "*Certainly this man also was with Him, for He is a Galilean too!*" (Those who lived in Jerusalem had a different Hebrew accent.) ... At that moment Peter said, "*Man, I do not know what you are talking about*" ... And Mark 14:71 intensifies the scene for us... "*But he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know this man you are talking about!'*"

Luke 22:60 – “*And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.*”

In the midst of the trial in the inner court... apparently Jesus could turn his head and look out the door to the porch... and His eyes looked deep into Peter's eyes for a moment. ..."*And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, 'Before a cock crows today, you will deny Me three times.'*"

As I mentioned earlier... by taking all of the gospel accounts into consideration... it appears that Peter actually denied Jesus **four** times... not just **three**. ... Now Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him three times... does this mean that we have a problem...? Is this an error in the Bible...? ... No... It happened exactly the way Jesus said that it would. ... Peter denied Jesus three times **before** the cock crowed... and then the cock crowed - **while** Peter was in the process of his fourth denial.

Peter's pride was shattered by a proud rooster: "*And he went out and wept bitterly*" (Luke 22:62).

At that moment... Jesus... being led away to the next trial... turned and looked at Peter - and His look broke Peter's heart. ... While the bystanders were watching Jesus... Peter slipped out and went off and wept bitterly. It is to Peter's **credit** that all the Lord had to do... was *look* at him to bring him to the place of repentance.

For **one** cock to crow... at the **right time** ... while the other birds in the city remained **silent**... was certainly a miracle. ... But the crowing of the cock was much **more** than a miracle that fulfilled our Lord's prediction... it was

also a special message to Peter... a message that helped to **restore** him to fellowship again.

What encouragements did the crowing of the cock give to Peter?

First... it was an assurance to him that Jesus Christ was still in control of things... even though He was a prisoner... bound... and seemingly helpless before His captors. ... Peter could recall witnessing his Lord's authority... over the fish... the winds... and the waves... and even over disease and death. ... No matter how dark the hour looked for Peter... Jesus was still in control!

Second... the crowing of the cock assured Peter that he could be forgiven. Peter had not been paying close attention to the Word of God. ... He had argued with it... disobeyed it... and even run ahead of it... but now (look what verse 61 declares...) "*he remembered the word of the Lord*"... and this brought him hope. ... Why? ... Because with the word of warning... was also a promise of restoration! ... Peter would be converted and strengthen his brethren.

Through all of this predicted sifting... that Satan was doing... Christ was preserving Peter... so that only real wheat would remain. ... Peter was being made into a man of substance.

Christ had said, "*when you have turned back*" (Luke 22:32)... The message was clear: though his intense denials were awful... Peter would be granted repentance. - And repent he would. ... Not only that... Jesus had said that when Peter turned back... Peter was to "strengthen [his] brothers." ... He

would have a **ministry**— a strengthening ministry. ...This atrocious sinner would actually become a **pillar** of the church.

The reason Peter had not been sifted into oblivion... the reason he repented and was restored... was Christ's prayer for him: "*But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail*" (Luke 22:32a).

When Peter was indulging in his post-supper snooze in Gethsemane... Jesus prayed for him. ... In fact... Jesus is doing the same for you and I right now...

Hebrews 4:14-16 (ESV)

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

All of these horrible circumstances... of being sifted like wheat... were meant by God to perfect Peter in the sense of maturing him. ...Of course... Peter never became perfect in this life. ... No one does! ... Evidence of his imperfections abound. (For example in Galatians 2:11-14... when Peter bowed to peer pressure again... and refused to eat at the same table with gentiles). ... Nevertheless... a massive perfecting took place in Peter in respect to his innate... fleshly presumption. ... From here on, the Scriptures record a different Peter. ... Gone was the presumption... Gone

was the arrogance... Gone was the independence... Gone was the self-reliance.

John 21 records that after the resurrection of Jesus... Peter encountered Him on the shores of the sea of Galilee... preparing some fish for him on a charcoal fire. ... Peter's heart was both thrilled and broken. ... After Jesus asked the once proud Peter... if he loved Him... and Jesus asked Peter this three times... as if He didn't believe Peter... the humbled fisherman said he **really** did. ... At that time... Jesus forgave him and gave him his ministry: "*Feed my sheep.*"

Some thirty years later a humble and faithful Peter wrote to the suffering Christians in Turkey who were facing severe religious persecution from Rome. ... He recalled his own temptation to deny Christ... and the pride that caused his failure... and he poured everything he had learned from that... into **these** words... which have saved many believers since... from their hour of temptation:

1 Peter 5:5-9 (ESV)

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

God **excels** at perfecting His saints. ... Delivering us from self-sufficiency is a major function of the ups and downs... all the persistent trials that you

and I face of this life. ... Paul sought the Lord three times to have a certain affliction removed... but God answered.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (ESV)

*“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made **perfect** in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Have you ever been tempted to deny you are a disciple of Jesus? ... Each one of us... at one time or another... will fail the Lord and then hear (in one way or another) "the crowing of the cock." ... Satan will tell us that we are finished... that our future has been destroyed... but that is not **God's** message to us. ... It was certainly not the end for Peter!

I hope most of us will never have to face such intense persecution for our faith... as many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are experiencing right now in countries like Egypt... Iran... and Northern Kenya. ... But do you know what...? ... I find myself almost daily... being placed in a variety of circumstances... in which I am tempted to deny... in actions or in words... my relationship with Jesus.

I notice this temptation occurs when I feel the threat that if I act or speak out for the Lord... I might be rejected as a person. ... (It's nothing like a threat of being tortured.) ... But in those moments of threat... I forget to pray... because I am too busy trying to protect myself.

I think most of us are tempted to deny Christ... when we **stop** praying about all the circumstances of our daily lives... and allow ourselves to fall

into the attitude that we can handle life's challenges on our own. ... And if we are in the habit of wrongfully assuming we can handle normal matters of our life... on our own... we will think the same way about our ministry involvement.

We open ourselves up to deny Christ... when we see... our personal lives... our health... our security... family... children... and homes threatened... and with little (or no) prayer... in a fit of anxiety... we start focusing on building up our defenses.

We open ourselves up to deny Christ... when we become too busy in the affairs of the world... the family... or the church... so that we acquire the sense... that the solution to our problems depends on us and us alone.

Listen... God is interested in perfecting you and I... so that we fall into temptation less and less... and do not deny Him. ... He is praying for you and I... and Jesus says that we must also be praying.