

“*Lord,*” said Peter, “*with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!*” This is a bold statement. Suitable for framing and hanging on the wall. Or even better, as the inscription upon the gravestone. Except for one thing, he did not live up to his words. Next week, we will hear the bitter story of Peter’s denials. So, perhaps these words instead would be a more fitting epitaph: Here lies Peter, who vowed to be faithful unto death, but failed miserably.

In every Lenten season we get to pick on Peter. And he certainly seems to deserve it. He sets himself up for a fall by making such a vow in the first place.

Yet haven’t you and I done the same? You will find the words, the vow you spoke before God’s very altar in the Order of Confirmation in our hymnal. It’s right there in black and white on page 273. “Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God...even to death?” And you said, “I do.” And then this, “Do you intend to continue in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?” And again, you made the same exact vow just as Peter did.

It might be a tad fun to pick on Peter, but not so fun to pick on ourselves. Yet we deserve it as much as he. You and I have failed miserably just as he did. The vow you made, and I made, we have broken. Not just once, or twice, but often.

Maybe our wall hanging, and the epitaph for our gravestone, should be the words of Paul, “*The good I want to do, I don’t do it, but I practice the evil I don’t want to do.*” Or even the same words which could be inscribed on Peter’s stone: Here lies a Christian confirmand who vowed to be faithful unto death but failed miserably.

But since when does Peter’s vow, and our vow, even though broken into pieces, determine what God thinks of us and does with us? The Order of Confirmation in our hymnal does not trump, or override, the Order of Holy Baptism. We need to back up a few pages from 273 and open up to page 268. Here we have God’s promises to you. The promises connected to your baptism into Christ. Including, from St. Mark, “*Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved.*” And from St. Peter, the same Peter who vowed to go both to prison and to death with Jesus, “*Baptism now saves you.*”

Baptism, not your confirmation vow, saves you. Your vow does not set aside God’s promises to you in your baptism even if you smash your vow to smithereens. God is merciful and forgiving, not because of what you vow to Him, but because of Jesus Christ in whom you are baptized.

Jesus kept His vows, all of them. What He said He would do, He did. He was faithful to His promises to you even to death. The bloody death of the cross.

This is not to say that your vows, including your confirmation vows, are not important. They are important. Keep your vows. And do not make vows that you do not intend to keep. Yet do not despair if you break your vow, even your vow to God. Your words are not the final words. God’s words are final. And His words to you in Christ are, “I forgive you. I forgive all your sins, even the sins connected to the breaking of your vows.”

We know that Peter failed in life regarding his vows. But by God's grace he did, in the end, go both to prison and to death with Jesus.

And this is why, when you vowed to be faithful unto death, you said, "I do, by the grace of God." We all fail miserably every day. And we would all fail to be faithful unto death. But God is faithful. And He is forgiving. And this is why you will be faithful unto death and receive the crown of life. For truly, the epitaph on your gravestone could be this: Here lies a forgiven sinner, one to whom God was faithful. Amen.