

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
LENTEN MIDWEEK SERVICE
March 30, 2022
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PRELUDE *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*
Setting: David Maxwell

VESPER VERSE (Stand) p.229

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare Your praise.

Make haste, O God, to deliver me;
make haste to help me, O Lord.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.
Praise to You, O Christ, Lamb of our salvation.**

LENTEN HYMN #425 *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*

- 1 **When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.**
- 2 **Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.**
- 3 **See, from His head, His hands, His feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?**
- 4 **Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a tribute far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!**

FIRST READING (Be seated) Genesis 42:6–24

Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land." They said to him, "No, my lord,

your servants have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies.”

He said to them, “No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see.” And they said, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more.” But Joseph said to them, “It is as I said to you. You are spies. By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.” And he put them all together in custody for three days.

On the third day Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” And they did so. Then they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.” And Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.” They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORY (Stand)

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Deliver me, O Lord, my God, for You are the God of my salvation.

Rescue me from my enemies, protect me from those who rise against me.

In You, O Lord, do I put my trust, leave me not, O Lord, my God.

Rescue me from my enemies, protect me from those who rise against me.

Deliver me, O Lord, my God, for You are the God of my salvation.

Rescue me from my enemies, protect me from those who rise against me.

SECOND READING

Luke 23:1-25

Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.” But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”

When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him.”

But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”— a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more,

desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SERMON (Be seated)

Tonight’s Passion reading tells how Jesus stood trial. As we heard, our Lord actually endured three trials. First, he stood before Pilate, the Roman Governor. Then before Herod, the Galilean leader. Following that, he stood before Pilate one more time.

Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against him and no guilt on his part was proved. He should have been released. But the local leader’s jealousies, Pilate’s desire for an easy path to peace, and the people’s preference for a more militant man of action all conspired against him. In the end, the will of an angry mob prevailed, and Jesus was sentenced to death.

That Passion account provides an interesting parallel to our first reading tonight – the one where we continued our reading about Joseph. In that reading, Joseph’s brothers are on trial. They think the trial is only about whether or not they are spies. But what they don’t realize is that the one standing in front of them knows about their great crime from years earlier – how they sold their own brother into slavery and then covered it up. The one standing before them knows all this because he is that brother – Joseph – who recognizes them and now has the power to execute justice and give them the sentence they deserve.

But what will Joseph do? Tonight we just get some of his initial reactions. But these reactions are instructive, and we’ll examine them.

And what about the brothers? What will they do? When accused of being spies, they start thinking a little differently. We’ll examine that as well.

Finally, what about us? How do we fit into this story?

Let’s begin our examination of these questions with Joseph’s first reactions. The text tells us that the first thing Joseph did upon recognizing his brothers was to treat them like strangers and speak roughly to them. This reaction is completely understandable – for they had done a horrible thing to him. The trauma of those days must surely have come rushing back to Joseph. Even though he was in a place of complete power and safety at the moment, those feelings of being threatened and abused would have made him feel like a scared child once again.

The next reaction Joseph has is to remember his dreams. “Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them,” says the text. The feelings of fear must have brought them back.

Those dreams, we recall, were of Joseph’s brothers all bowing down to him. And at the time, everyone thought the dreams were immature and haughty. And maybe they were. But looking back, one wonders if those dreams might have helped sustain Joseph during his difficult times – convincing him that he would prevail over his tormentors. The dreams clearly must have been given by God. For hadn’t Joseph achieved his greatest success through dreams? His dreams weren’t a reflection of his desires and ambition but were given to him instead. They were gifts from God.

As his brothers stood before him begging for help, those dreams would have come back as a source comfort to Joseph once again. They would have served strongly as a reminder of God’s presence.

But even with that comforting thought, Joseph continued to speak roughly and sternly to his brothers – now also accusing them of being spies. Was this hard edge of his just emotional defenses coming out and serving as his protection? Was it a vengeful desire of his to see his brothers suffer? Or was it something more?

As the conversation with the brothers goes on, Joseph eventually proposes a test. “By this you shall be tested,” he said, “by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here.” And to make them think about this, he holds them in custody for three days.

When the brothers were brought before Joseph again, they agreed to his test. What more could they do? And as they started to discuss their plans for carrying it out, they began to reflect on their situation. Their reflection, as we see, quickly sparked their consciences. For they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.”

The brothers, just like Joseph, were taken back to that fateful time too. They remembered how they had acted so horribly and caused such anguish to one who was innocent. Their current stress brought their sins back to light.

Luther said of the brothers at this point: “Thus the sons of Jacob have an evil conscience. And because of this they tremble horribly and fear God’s vengeance.”

The human conscience is a powerful thing. Yes, some people seem to live without one. But we all have them. It’s just that some are more highly developed than others. And some are better listeners to their conscience.

Christians have always recognized the need to cultivate a healthy conscience. It is done as people listen to God and as they live in community.

An early Christian illustration of the conscience is its comparison to a window. According to this understanding, the conscience is like a window through which you view the world. A bad or guilty conscience, therefore, is like a dirty window. When you look through it, everything appears darker, and you tend to see your reflection more than you normally would.

This helps us understand that when we conceal our shameful conduct, our whole world will begin to look dirty and dark. And we will question ourselves – even to the point of becoming paranoid and insecure. Luther said of the brothers: “They are not only troubled about the sin of which they were conscious – although they took pains to cover it and conceal it – but they were also afraid of all their words and deeds, and they imagined that there was new guilt in every action or thought” (AE 7:277).

A troubled conscience, as we know, brings great pain. Guilt over sin will not only weigh us down but will eventually cause us to sink.

Some people say we should just skip the guilt. We should act as if it doesn’t exist and avoid anything that would bring it to mind. But that never works.

Christians have a better solution. We bring our guilt to God for his cleansing.

“If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us,” says the scripture. “But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

If a guilty conscience is like a dirty window, then confession and absolution is the cleansing God gives to make our conscience clear. It restores our view – our outlook on life – so that we can see God’s light shining upon us and shining around us.

All that being said, the journey from a dirty conscience to a clean one is not an easy one. And it’s a journey a person cannot make without God’s help.

We sinners can become smug and comfortable in our sin. To turn our hearts, God's Law must do its work. The Law must lead us in the steps of repentance by showing our sins and reminding us of the punishment our sin deserves.

In the Joseph story, Joseph's actions towards his brothers represent those steps of repentance. When Joseph speaks and acts harshly, this represents God's disapproval. When Joseph treats them like strangers and puts them through their paces it mimics how God brings sin to remembrance. When Joseph holds them in custody and gives them a test it echoes how God allows the weight of our sin to crush our smugness and comfort.

Like Joseph's brothers, we, too, know what it feels like to be chased by a guilty conscience – to have our view of the world clouded and smudged by the stain of our own sin. Joseph's brother Reuben speaks for all of us when he says: "now there comes a reckoning for [the] blood." We know our sin has consequences, and that we must pay.

And yet, we also know that we have a brother who responds when we ask him for help. This brother rose from the prison of death itself. And this brother has appeared to us and made himself known.

This brother is Jesus, who took our sins upon himself and gave his blood as a reckoning for them. He endured the pain and shame of the cross so that we might be cleansed.

In tonight's Passion Reading we heard about a man named Barabbas. Barabbas was a rebel and a murderer. He was guilty on all counts and about to receive a reckoning for his evil acts. But Barabbas was set free. And Jesus died in his place.

So it is with us. Jesus has died in our place. He shed his innocent blood that we might be cleansed of our sin, guilt and shame.

And because of this we no longer need to be chased and hounded by a dirty, sin-filled conscience. Rather, we can live each day in the bright clarity of our Lord's forgiveness and peace. We no longer need to be afraid of the truth. Jesus has answered for our sins. Justice has been served on his cross. Our conscience has been cleansed by his blood.

God brings help to the troubled conscience. Let us always turn to him and live. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

LENTEN HYMN #420 Sts. 1-4 Christ, the Life of All the Living

- 1 Christ, the life of all the living,
Christ, the death of death, our foe,
Who, Thyself for me once giving
To the darkest depths of woe:
Through Thy suff'rings, death, and merit
I eternal life inherit.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.**

- 2 Thou, ah! Thou, hast taken on Thee
Bonds and stripes, a cruel rod;
Pain and scorn were heaped upon Thee,
O Thou sinless Son of God!
Thus didst Thou my soul deliver
From the bonds of sin forever.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.**

- 3 Thou hast borne the smiting only
That my wounds might all be whole;
Thou hast suffered, sad and lonely,
Rest to give my weary soul;
Yea, the curse of God enduring,
Blessing unto me securing.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.
- 4 Heartless scoffers did surround Thee,
Treating Thee with shameful scorn
And with piercing thorns they crowned Thee.
All disgrace Thou, Lord, hast borne,
That as Thine Thou mightest own me
And with heav'nly glory crown me.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

OFFERING

Offerings support the church's mission work – both here and through our many partners. Offerings may be placed in the box at the sanctuary entrance or sent to the church through our website or the mail.

Fellowship Cards help us welcome new people and track participation. Please fill one out and place it in the offering box following the service.

LITANY (Kneel)

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In peace let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For Matthew, our Synod President, John, our District President, for all pastors in Christ, for all servants of the Church, and for all the people, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For Joseph, our President, for all public servants, for the government and those who protect us, that they may be upheld and strengthened in every good deed, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For those who work to bring peace, justice, health, and protection in this and every place, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For those who bring offerings, those who do good works in this congregation, those who toil, those who sing, and all the people here present who await from the Lord great and abundant mercy, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For favorable weather, for an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and need, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For . . . [additional bids for prayer may be inserted here] . . . let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For the faithful who have gone before us and are with Christ, let us give thanks to the Lord:

Thanks be to God.

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

Silence for individual prayer may follow.

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, let us commend ourselves, one another, and our whole life to Christ, our Lord:

To You, O Lord.

COLLECT FOR PEACE

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

BENEDICAMUS AND BENEDICTION (Stand)

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN #881

Christ, Mighty Savior

- 1 Christ, mighty Savior, Light of all creation,
You make the daytime radiant with the sunlight
And to the night give glittering adornment,
Stars in the heavens.**
- 2 Now comes the day's end as the sun is setting,
Mirror of daybreak, pledge of resurrection;
While in the heavens choirs of stars appearing
Hallow the nightfall.**
- 3 Therefore we come now evening rites to offer,
Joyfully chanting holy hymns to praise You,
With all creation joining hearts and voices
Singing Your glory.**

- 4 Give heed, we pray You, to our supplication,
That You may grant us pardon for offenses,
Strength for our weak hearts, rest for aching bodies,
Soothing the weary.**
- 5 Though bodies slumber, hearts shall keep their vigil,
Forever resting in the peace of Jesus,
In light or darkness worshiping our Savior
Now and forever.**

POSTLUDE

Christ, Mighty Savior
Setting: Jonathan Kohrs

THOSE SERVING:

Greeter: Jim Easterly
Reader: Aaron Siebrass

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