

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
LENTEN MIDWEEK SERVICE
March 9, 2022
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PRELUDE

O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig
Setting: Johan Sebastian Bach

VESPER VERSE (Stand)

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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 #434

Lamb of God, Pure and Holy

- 1 Lamb of God, pure and holy,
Who on the cross didst suffer,
Ever patient and lowly,
Thyself to scorn didst offer.
All sins Thou borest for us,
Else had despair reigned o'er us:
Have mercy on us, O Jesus! O Jesus!
- 2 Lamb of God, pure and holy,
Who on the cross didst suffer,
Ever patient and lowly,
Thyself to scorn didst offer.
All sins Thou borest for us,
Else had despair reigned o'er us:
Have mercy on us, O Jesus! O Jesus!
- 3 Lamb of God, pure and holy,
Who on the cross didst suffer,
Ever patient and lowly,
Thyself to scorn didst offer.
All sins Thou borest for us,
Else had despair reigned o'er us:
Thy peace be with us, O Jesus! O Jesus!

FIRST READING (Be seated)

Genesis 37:12-36

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am." So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word." So

he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" "I am seeking my brothers," he said. "Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams." But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; cast him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and cast him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes and returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?" Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not." And he identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him. Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

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 22:14-30

And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.

A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

"You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SERMON (Be seated)

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen. Dear friends in Christ:

The punishment didn't fit the crime. Of what was Joseph guilty? What had he done that was so bad? What crime had he committed?

Sure, his father Jacob loved him more than his eleven brothers and had given him a robe of many colors. But Joseph had no control over that. And, yes, he might have been wiser to keep his dreams to himself. He didn't do himself any favors by telling his brothers about how their sheaves of grain bowed down to his sheaf of grain or about how the sun, moon and eleven stars were bowing down to him. Joseph was rebuked by his father for speaking that way, which should have settled the matter. Everyone should have moved on. But they didn't. Joseph's brothers would mete out their own punishment – punishment that didn't fit the crime.

It all happened when sibling rivalry and fraternal jealousy quickly escalated and spiraled out of control. Sin, evil and wickedness just seemed to snowball. Almost overnight, it seemed, Joseph's brothers were suddenly giving serious thought to homicide and fratricide. Premeditated murder in the first degree was casually tossed out for discussion: "Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams" (v. 20). Only a last-minute intervention by Reuben prevented them from killing their brother.

But Joseph's brothers found a fate for him almost as bad as death. They sold him into slavery – for twenty shekels of silver. And then they proceeded to break the heart of their old father by deceiving him about the death of his dear Joseph. What cold, compassionless hearts those brothers must have had to stand there unmoved while the family patriarch wept with a broken heart, saying: "I will go to my grave in grief."

But don't be too quick to condemn Joseph's brothers. For you and I are more like them than we care to admit.

How many broken relationships and fractured friendships can we count in our lives that disintegrated over little conflicts and then quickly escalated into something more? Escalating conflict is one of the things we do best – especially when we feel slighted, disrespected or unfairly treated. "I'll see your slight and raise you an insult," we say. "I'll knock you down a notch or two and put you in the place where you belong."

And how many older parents like Jacob do we know who are treated treacherously by their children – deceived and disrespected instead of honored, loved and cherished? Maybe even ours.

Where these sins and others are concerned, there is nothing new under the sun. Joseph's brothers committed them. And so do we.

But what's most shocking in tonight's text, is not the wickedness of man but the silence of God. This family, with all their flaws and failures, were the chosen people of God. All God's promises for life and salvation rested on them. From this family would one day come the Christ. Yet what does the Lord do to stave off this shameful situation? Nothing.

Luther calls this "a wondrous silence." He writes: "God lets it happen. He seems quietly still, sleeping, deaf and completely hardened. He has no compassion at all and acts as if he also didn't know this dear [Joseph]. All the angels are also silent as this treasure is snatched away to Egypt... What is God doing here with his chosen ones?... What is this, that he forsakes them so miserably?"

Why *does* God allow this to happen? Why is he silent? Why doesn't he intervene?

Why didn't he warn Jacob about the risk in sending Joseph up to Shechem to find his brothers? Sending him wasn't a wise move. And once Joseph gets to Shechem and can't find his brothers, why didn't God keep Joseph from meeting that stranger who just happened to know that their brothers and their flocks had moved on to Dothan? If not for that stranger, Joseph might have just turned around and gone home. And never sold into slavery.

But of course, if Joseph wouldn't have been sold into slavery, he never would have ended up in Egypt. And if he never ended up in Egypt, he never would have saved his family from famine. And if he had never saved his family from famine, there would have been no calling of Moses, no Exodus from Egypt and no entry into the promised land.

God seems to be silent while all of this unfolds. But his silence is a wondrous silence, for he is in fact watching closely. And not only is he watching, but also acting, reacting, waiting and guiding the tragedies and triumphs of his people in ways he knows to be best. Ways that only he can know.

St. Paul seems to have all of this in mind when he says to the Romans: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

Joseph certainly teaches us about hope. He teaches us how to receive the silence of God in faith.

And we need this teaching, for we've all wondered "where is God in all of this?" As tragedy unfolds around us, as temptation engulfs us, as conflict escalates and as sin spirals out of control God's silence seems unfair.

Surely Joseph thought this as the Ishmaelites hauled him down to Egypt. It's unfair! It's unjust!

And yes, for poor Joseph, the punishment didn't fit the crime.

But God cared for Joseph. And looking back, we can now see that part of God's planning here was to provide for the comfort of his people. And especially as Joseph points ahead to our Lord Jesus.

Luther makes this connection as he reflects on Joseph's ordeal. He says: "Joseph is dead and buried. He has his Good Friday... His father also dies, but they are both raised again by the power of God who can even make the dead alive. The heart of the believer must yet live and rise again even if ten worlds bury him."

Joseph's punishment was unfair and unjust. And for a time it seemed that there was no one to rescue and deliver him. There was only silence.

But it was a wondrous silence. And not unlike the silence of Good Friday. There, hanging on the cross, Jesus cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" His punishment, suffering and crucifixion did not fit the crime. His punishment, like Joseph's, was fratricide in the first degree, since his own brothers – which includes you and me through our sin – sent him to the cross.

It was unfair and unjust. Of what was Jesus guilty? Nothing. What crimes had Jesus committed? None. But Jesus hung there with nails and thorns for all the crimes of his brothers and sisters. Including yours and mine.

We do the crime; he gets the punishment. We do the sin; he gets the nails.

He bore our sin so that we might have full and free forgiveness. He went down into the pit of hell so that we might rise again to live forever.

When God is silent in your life, don't lose hope. When God seems quiet and still and distant as life unravels, trust him. When crosses and trials close in around you, remember that he works all things for your eternal good.

Yes, he watched quietly as Joseph sank into the depths. But only so that he could raise him up and see his people through their days of famine and into their future – where they would always be able to tell of God's faithfulness to Joseph and know that he would be faithful to them as well.

Through Jesus, God has saved you from your sins. In the quiet splash of your Baptism... in the preaching of his promises... and with his very body and blood God is at work for you and for your siblings – all of your brothers and sisters in Christ. He is working for you in the times of silence. He is working for you in times of struggle.

God raised Jesus from the dead. God has forgiven your sins. And God will care, protect and provide for you as you have need.

May he keep you also in faith. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

LENTEN HYMN #431 Not all the Blood of Beasts

- 1 Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace
Or wash away the stain.**
- 2 But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.**
- 3 My faith would lay its hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While as a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.**
- 4 My soul looks back to see
The burden Thou didst bear
When hanging on the cursèd tree;
I know my guilt was there.**
- 5 Believing, we rejoice
To see the curse remove;
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice
And sing His bleeding love.**

OFFERING

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 #885 Stz. 1,2, 4-6

"I Lie, O Lord, within Your Care"

- 1 I lie, O Lord, within Your care,
Awake or when I'm sleeping.
Whoever trusts in Your strong arms
Is safe within Your keeping.**
- 2 Lord, You alone keep constant watch;
My restless heart You quiet.
When darkness fills the night with fear,
I will by faith defy it.**
- 4 It is enough that You are near;
I need not now discover
What hidden plans You have for me,
My future's path uncover.**
- 5 Tomorrow's road I cannot trace
Nor know what ills will meet me.
You only ask that I be still
And trust You there will greet me.**
- 6 Each dawning day to which I wake
Will show Your hand still guiding
And ev'ry good my life requires
Your grace again providing.**

THOSE SERVING:

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