

Psalms, Songs, and Solitude

Holy Week Devotions – Calvary Lutheran Church

April 2, 2020

This is a strange season for our country and our world. Holy Week this year coincides with our shelter-in-place practices as we watch coronavirus case counts multiply, deaths rise, jobs evaporate, and worries compound.

We will celebrate Easter. We need to celebrate Easter. But we also need to acknowledge what comes before. As God's people experiencing the pains and sorrows of this world, we need to meditate on the sorrows our God endured for us.

If Easter has any meaning at all, it is found in a hope which looks beyond the hardships we know today. In that light, the meaning we find in Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday is in their connection to the waiting we endure now. God will call us to join him in the new life supplied in the resurrection of Jesus. But first, our God joins us in the hardships of the life we live now.

The following devotions are intended to help us walk together through these days as a family. These meditations will acknowledge the sorrows Jesus endured, the trials we face, and the presence of our God in the midst of our trials.

Jesus, I will ponder now on your holy passion;
With your Spirit me endow for such meditation.
Grant that I in love and faith may the image cherish
Of your suffering pain, and death that I may not perish.

("Jesus, I Will Ponder Now" – LSB 440 v1)

Here for you,



Matt Behrens, Pastor

Maundy Thursday

April 9, 2020

Begin by reading Psalm 55 from a favorite Bible.

This is the day on which Jesus gathered with his 12 closest companions to celebrate the Passover meal. They didn't know it at the time, but Jesus was providing a farewell meal.

Sometime early in the evening Jesus took up a bowl of water, wrapped a towel around his waist, and began washing his disciples' feet. Later in the evening, he would predict his betrayal and institute the Lord's Supper. We know that Judas departs at some point, and becomes the betrayer. Yet, even he has his feet washed by Jesus.

In John's gospel these realities are tied closely together:

During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. (John 13:2-4)

God's people have rightly prayed the psalms throughout history and we have made them our own. They are songs and prayers. As Christians, we read the psalms with Jesus in sight. In fact, we can go a step further and read them as prayers of Jesus.

You read Psalm 55 at the start of this devotion. (If not, you can go back to that step and do it now. I'll wait for you.) There are some key points in this psalm which point to the betrayal of Jesus on Maundy Thursday. We hear Jesus speaking in this psalm.

For it is not an enemy who taunts me—

then I could bear it;

it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—

then I could hide from him.

But it is you, a man, my equal,

my companion, my familiar friend. (Psalm 55:12-13)

In verse 13, the psalmist uses four distinct parallels to describe the betrayer – “a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.” Each one becomes more pointed. Each becomes more personal. It’s as if the hurt goes deeper and deeper with each step.

This is Jesus betrayed by Judas. This is Jesus being hurt, not by an enemy but by a friend. A few verses later he says this.

*My companion stretched out his hand against his friends;
he violated his covenant. (Psalm 55:20)*

It hurts to have a friend turn their back on you. If you’ve felt that pain of betrayal, you know the depth to which it can cut. This is the pain Jesus felt on Maundy Thursday.

What’s more, you and I own this pain as well. Judas is not the only one who “violated his covenant” as the psalm says. We betray Jesus too. We chase other friends and comforters. We sacrifice the closeness of Jesus in order to keep peace with family or friends. We ignore the call to generosity in favor of self-sufficiency. We trust ourselves to avoid hardship, and as a result we avoid Jesus as he takes up a cross.

We see ourselves in the upper room on Maundy Thursday. We find ourselves in the prayer of Jesus as we read Psalm 55. We see our sin on display. However, we also find hope in these places. We may betray Jesus by word and action, but he never betrays us. He always counts you as a friend.

Jesus washes your feet. That event was significant for you and I as a sign of God’s grace. Jesus is the one who makes us clean, if we allow him. He is the one who removes the filth of sin and guilt. He washes us so that we can sit at a meal with him and receive his gifts.

In Psalm 55 he invites us to trust him with this task. He invites us – even after our betrayal – to bring the weight of sin, and trust him to deal with it. For the span of one verse in that psalm, instead of talking about his betrayer or about his God, Jesus speaks to you.

*Cast your burden on the Lord,
and he will sustain you;*

*he will never permit
the righteous to be moved. (Psalm 55:22)*

This Maundy Thursday, find yourself in the upper room. Recognize your place as a friend of Jesus. Recognize the hurts he endures, even those brought by you. Then, receive his invitation to forgiveness as he washes your feet. Hear his prayer and cast your burdens on him. He will carry them to Golgatha. He will take them to the cross.

My song is love unknown,
My Savior's love to me,
Love to the loveless shown
That they might lovely be.
Oh, who am I
That for my sake
My Lord should take
Frail flesh and die?

(“My Song is Love Unknown” – LSB 430)

Good Friday - Seven Last Words

April 10, 2020

This arrangement follows the traditional order of the seven last words of Jesus from the cross, coupled with readings from Psalm 22 and verses from appropriate hymns. Read Jesus' words. Reflect on them in light of the psalm. Then, use the selected hymns to guide your prayer and meditation as you thank God for Jesus this Good Friday.

First Word - Luke 23:34

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Psalm 22:1-5

¹ *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

² *O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.*

³ *Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.*

⁴ *In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.*

⁵ *To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.*

Jesus, in your dying woes, even while your lifeblood flows,
Craving pardon for your foes: Hear us, holy Jesus.

Savior, for our pardon sue when our sins your pangs renew,
For we know not what to do: Hear us, holy Jesus.

(“Jesus, in Your Dying Woes” – LSB 447 v1,2)

Second Word - Luke 23:43

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Psalm 22:6-8

⁶ *But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.*

⁷ *All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;*

⁸ *“He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”*

Alas! And did my Savior bleed, and did my sov'reign die?
Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?

Was it for crimes that I had done he groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity, grace unknown, and love beyond degree!

(“Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed” – LSB 437 v1,2)

Third Word - John 19:26-27

“Woman, behold, your son! . . . Behold, your mother!”

Psalm 22:9-11

⁹ *Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.*

¹⁰ *On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother's womb you have been my God.*

¹¹ *Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.*

O sacred head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, thine only crown.
O sacred head, what glory, what bliss, till now was thine!
Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call thee mine.

Be thou my consolation, my shield, when I must die;
Remind me of thy passion when my last hour draws nigh.
Mine eyes shall then behold thee, upon thy cross shall dwell,
My heart by faith enfold thee. Who dieth thus dies well.

(“O Sacred Head, Now Wounded” – LSB 450 v1,7)

Fourth Word - Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Psalm 22:1, 12-13

¹ *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning. . .*

¹² *Many bulls encompass me;
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;*

¹³ *they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.*

O dearest Jesus, what law hast thou broken
That such sharp sentence should on thee be spoken?
Of what great crime has thou to make confession, what dark transgression?

What punishment so strange is suffered yonder!
The shepherd dies for sheep that loved to wander;
The master pays the debt his servants owe him. Who would not know him?
(“O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken” – LSB 439 v1,4)

Fifth Word - John 19:28

“I thirst.”

Psalm 22:14-18

¹⁴ *I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;*
¹⁵ *my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.*
¹⁶ *For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—*
¹⁷ *I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;*
¹⁸ *they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.*

Stricken, smitten, and afflicted, see him dying on the tree!
'Tis the Christ, by man rejected; yes, my soul, 'tis he, 'tis he!
'Tis the long-expected prophet, David's Son, yet David's Lord;
Proofs I see sufficient of it: 'Tis the true and faithful Word.

Tell me, ye who hear him groaning, was there ever grief like his?
Friends through fear his cause disowning, foes insulting his distress;
Many hands were raised to wound him, none would intervene to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced him was the stroke that justice gave.
(“Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted” – LSB 451 v1,2)

Sixth Word - John 19:30

"It is finished."

Psalm 22:19-21

¹⁹ *But you, O Lord, do not be far off!*

O you my help, come quickly to my aid!

²⁰ *Deliver my soul from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dog!*

²¹ *Save me from the mouth of the lion!*

You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!

O perfect life of love! All, all, is finished now,
All that he left his throne above to do for us below.

No work is left undone of all the Father willed;
His toil, his sorrows, one by one, the scriptures have fulfilled.

("O Perfect Life of Love" – LSB 452 v1,2)

Seventh Word - Luke 23:46

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"

Psalm 22:22-31

²² *I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:*

²³ *You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,
and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!*

²⁴ *For he has not despised or abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted,
and he has not hidden his face from him,
but has heard, when he cried to him.*

²⁵ *From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will perform before those who fear him.*

²⁶ *The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord!
May your hearts live forever!*

²⁷ *All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord,*

*and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.*

²⁸ *For kingship belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations.*

²⁹ *All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
even the one who could not keep himself alive.*

³⁰ *Posterity shall serve him;
it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;*

³¹ *they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn,
that he has done it.*

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 sufferings, death, and merit I eternal life inherit.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto thee.

(“Christ, the Life of All the Living” – LSB 420 v1)

Holy Saturday

April 11, 2020

Psalm 130:1-5

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!

² *O Lord, hear my voice!*

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

³ *If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?*

⁴ *But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.*

Our God is good. He is forgiving and merciful. He gave his Son over to death so that you and I could receive life.

Our God is powerful. He will remake this world even as he's begun to remake us. He will wipe out every hurt, every sickness, every worry, every grief. He will wipe out sin and everything stained by sin. That's a fearful power – or it would be, if he did not first remove sin from you and me.

Psalm 130:5

*⁵ I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;*

(Set a timer for 5 minutes. Sit in silence and practice waiting. If your mind wanders, come back to the verse above and continue waiting once more. After 5 minutes, continue this devotion.)

Psalm 130:6-8

*⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
⁷ O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
⁸ And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.*

We wait for the resurrection. We wait for the new life and the Easter celebration. We know with confidence that tomorrow we will celebrate.

We also wait for an eternal resurrection. We wait for the fulfillment of this new life when our God makes all things new. We know with confidence that soon we will celebrate in his presence.

The body of Christ waits for a glorious awakening to new life.
(then...and now)