

The Way of the Cross

I. In the Garden (John 18:1-11)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

Meditation

Peter, why did you draw the sword? Didn't you see what just happened? The first time Jesus said "I AM," Judas and the band of soldiers and the officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees - the whole crowd with their lanterns and torches and weapons fell to the ground. At simply Jesus' word, His powerful word, they could not stand. They could not do anything. All earthly weapons are useless against the powerful Word of God.

But then it happens again. The hunters want their prey. But this time, there is no falling down. And it can be for one reason only: Jesus allows it to be so. He allows them to seize Him and bind Him. Even these cords, like Samson of old, He could have easily broken off and set Himself free. But He will not. For He will drink the cup the Father has given Him. And what cup is that? The cup of God's wrath against the sin of the world. And He would rather drink it than we drink it. He takes our place, that we may be let go. That we may be forgiven.

So you see Peter? To draw your sword and fight is to lose. For Jesus to die is to win. That is your victory. You do not understand that now, but you will. You will.

It is a hard lesson to learn, though. For how often are we like Peter, relying on the weapons of this world rather than the strong and powerful Word of God? Put your swords away. Put your anger away, your revenge away, your hatred away, your bitterness away, and instead forgive. Forgive as you have been forgiven. For still today, the powers of this world cannot stand against the Word of God. Satan and his minions still fall at the word of Christ. That is our weapon.

Jesus, the great I AM, the almighty God in the flesh, now gives Himself into the hands of sinners. For you. For *them*. For the life of the world. And not one of His own will be lost. Not then. Not ever.

II. Before the High Priest (John 18:12-14, 19-24)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?" Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Meditation

Jesus spoke openly to the world. In the day, in the light, no secrets, no subversion. He had nothing to hide. He was all truth, all the time. It was, in fact, the ones questioning Him that were being secretive and in hiding. They have Jesus arrested at night, under the cover of darkness. They call an illegal meeting of the council at night, in secrecy. They want to get rid of Jesus in the easiest and most expedient way. That's what Caiaphas had said after all: *it would be expedient that one man should die for the people*. They question Him, but it's a ruse; they have really already made up their minds.

But even more than this, Jesus doesn't just *do* everything in the light, He IS the light of the world (John 8:12). But those who love the darkness hate the light. Those who do evil will not come into the light. Those who are wicked will seek to extinguish the light. But they will not be able. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5). That will be true also while Jesus is hanging on the cross. All three of the other Evangelists tell us that at 12 Noon, when the sun should be at its highest and brightest, there was instead darkness over the whole land. It was the time of darkness, evil, and sin.

But never did the light of Christ shine brighter than in those moments. Never did His love burn hotter than when He stayed on the cross, suffering for the sin of the world. Suffering for you and your sin. When not the hand of a soldier, but the hand of God would strike Him. Because of you. *For* you. And this is what He taught in the synagogues and in the temple - that He, the Messiah, would do this very thing. He spoke the truth, and it is fulfilled.

Hymn #437 “Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed”

III. The King and His Kingdom (John 18:33-38)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

Meditation

What is truth? That is a question many ask today. Some ask honestly, truly wanting to know the truth. Some ask skeptically, thinking the truth really unknowable. And some ask mockingly, believing there is not one truth but many truths; or in other

words, that the truth is whatever you want it to be. And if that's so, then the truth really doesn't matter. The truth is sacrificed on the altar of my desires.

But, Jesus says, the truth is why He was born. The truth is why He has come into the world. To bear witness to the truth. That we may know the truth. That we may know Him. For Jesus is the way, **the truth**, and the life (John 14:6).

So there really is truth, Pilate. But are you listening? Are we? Or are our ambitions, our fears, our desires, our pleasures, our wants, making us deaf? Deaf to the truth of God's Law, deaf to the truth of our sin, deaf to the truth of our Saviour? It happens, doesn't it?

The good news is that Jesus gives hearing to the deaf. His Word goes forth from the beginning of creation to the end, that all people may know the truth. The truth that sets us free (John 8:32). The truth that our bondage to sin, our captivity to the grave, and our oppression by the evil one is being broken by our Saviour. Now. That there be a new king, a new ruler. One who does not act in sin and deal in death, but who reigns in peace and promises life. A new king and a new kingdom - not of this world, which is passing away, but a kingdom that will never pass away.

So yes, Pilate, Jesus is a king. He is, in fact, your king. For He is not just the king of a nation, for a time, but the king of the world, the king of creation. And though you do not know Him now, you will, on that day when *every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* (Philippians 2:10-11a).

That is the truth, Pilate. He is standing right before you.

IV. Condemned (John 19:1-16a)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would

have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.” So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!” They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

Meditation

When Adam plunged the world into sin, the ground was cursed and would no longer only grow good plants, but now thorns and thistles. Those thorns of sin now adorn the head of God’s Son.

When Adam plunged the world into sin, the hand of brother was raised against brother, as Cain jealously put his brother Abel to death. Now, the hands of sinners are raised against God’s Son.

When Adam plunged the world into sin, he tried to cover himself and hide his shame. Now, God’s Son is arrayed in a mocking purple robe to shame him.

All this, and yet Pilate says: *I find no guilt in Him.*

Behold the man! Yes, this is the depths to which man has sunk. And in these depths, there is Jesus!

You see, that’s the good news for us today. Do not feel sorry for Jesus. He wants to be there. For you. That’s why He does not speak. That’s why He does not object and proclaim His innocence. The Son of God becomes a son of man and lowers Himself all the way to our depth of sin and death, so that we sons of men might become sons of God and be exalted all the way to the heights of heaven. He takes our place that we have His place. So do not feel sorry for Jesus. Be grateful! And live this new life He has given you. This new life He gave so much to give you.

So finally, Pilate sits down on the judgment seat and passes judgment on Jesus. One day, the tables will be reversed. On the Last Day when Jesus the crucified and glorified will be the one sitting in judgment. But you need not fear that day. For you already know the judgment that will pronounced upon you, child of God. For on that day Jesus will say of you: *I find no guilt in Him.* For He took all your guilt away. He took it that day to the cross. That even though you die, yet shall you live, in Him, forever.

Hymn #420 (vs. 1-3) “Christ, the Life of All the Living”

V. On the Cross (John 19:16b-22)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

Meditation

What I have written I have written. In Aramaic, in Latin, and In Greek. So that all could see it and read it and know it. Pilate would not change his sign listing the charges against Jesus just because the Jews didn't like it. *What I have written I have written.*

So it is with the Word of God. What is written is written and will be done. Jesus goes just as it is written of Him.

The One promised to Adam and Eve, who would bruise the serpent's head.

The One promised to Abraham, who would bless all nations.

The One promised to David, who would be an eternal king and sit on the throne forever.

The One prophesied by Isaiah, who would suffer and die for all people.

The One propheised by Hosea, who would rise on the third day.

The One whose way John the Baptist prepared, the angels announced, and the Spirit anointed.

That One now hangs on the cross, going just as it is written of Him.

No longer enthroned in love between the Father and the Spirit, but now hanging in hate and scorn between two criminals.

But here, too, He is enthroned in love. His love for you.

And His work of the cross now written not in three languages, but in a multitude of languages - that all the world may know. Here is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, the Lord of the Church, the Son of God. Dying for you. That in His blood, you and your name be written by Him in the book of life. That on the Last Day, *what is written is written* and will be done - and you enter into that life that will never end.

VI. Blessed Words (John 19:23-27)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Meditation

The Scriptures often speak of Jesus as the Bridegroom and the Church as His Bride. Despite what is being said of and done to marriage in our day and age, it was and is and always will be God's idea and institution. That *a man leave his father and mother and hold fast to his bride, and the two become one flesh* (Matthew 19:5).

That is what is happening now with Jesus. He left His Father in heaven to become incarnate, to become man. He is now leaving His mother, entrusting her to the care of His disciple. And He is holding fast to His Bride, to you. Holding fast to you in love.

That's why He will not come down from the cross. He loves you more than His own life. He will stay, to make His Bride His. To make your sins His. To make your condemnation His. To make your unrighteousness His. To make your faithlessness His. To make your death His. And then also to give you what is His. His atonement yours. His blessing yours. His righteousness yours. His faithfulness and obedience yours. His life yours. For so it is with men and women made one flesh - what's mine is yours and what's yours in mine. So it is with you and your bridegroom, made one flesh.

Just before that, the soldiers divided up His clothes - one of the benefits of being on this duty. And one lucky soldier even got the expensive and fine tunic that Jesus wore. But you - you get even better than that. And not just one of you, but all of you. For Jesus has won for you the beautiful wedding dress of His love and righteousness, put upon you in the washing of water with the Word, in Holy Baptism. That you be splendid and glorious, without blemish. Perfect Brides, in perfect love - the perfection and love of Jesus for you, who in His resurrection will take you to His home, to live there, with Him, forever.

Hymn #453 (vs. 1-2, 6-7) "Upon the Cross Extended"

VII. Death (John 19:28-37)

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.”

Meditation

You don't hear it in the English, but in the Greek it is there. John wrote that Jesus said “I thirst” in order to fulfill the Scripture. And after receiving the sour wine, Jesus says: “It is finished.” But the Greek word there, translated as *finished*, is the same word as fulfill. It is finished *because* all is fulfilled. All the Scriptures have now been fulfilled. Jesus would not stop, would not die, until they were. Every jot and tittle, every last word. And then, and *only* then, when they were, when our redemption and salvation was completed, would Jesus *bow His head and give up His Spirit*.

And then we hear a remarkable thing: that *when one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, at once there came out blood and water*. Science has offered technical explanations for why that was, but the church has always seen in this a link to the life-giving Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Just as Adam's wife Eve received her life from his side, so Christ's Bride, the Church, receives her life from His side. For only in His death is our life. And so in His death come the water and blood that wash us clean from our sins and give us life.

And even here, too, is Jesus not stopping until all is complete, all is fulfilled, all is finished. For still today, the resurrected Jesus is working to save all people. And He does so by giving the benefits of His cross to us in His Word and Sacraments. And He will not stop until it is finished. Until His children from every nation, tribe, people, and language

are gathered into His kingdom. And we will look on *Him whom they have pierced*, glorified, in Paradise.

So we are not sad this day. Serious, yes. Sad, no. We gather in quiet peace and joy. Because we know the meaning of this day. We know this is the day our Saviour made everything good again. This the day of our salvation. So to our Saviour Jesus Christ, we give all thanks and praise. To our Great Redeemer, be all glory, honor, and worship, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. AMEN.