

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
First Sunday in Lent, February 18, 2018

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 159, 142:1, 145, 516, 144:5.

Lessons: Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, John 18:1

Sermon Text: Luke 22:39-46.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Today, the first Sunday in Lent, we begin our journey with Jesus to the grave. This is a trip many of you have taken many times. But as is most often the case when we study the Word of God, we can expect to learn something new or find new application to our lives. We begin this journey by looking at

CHRIST'S AGONY IN THE GARDEN

- 1. Jesus prayed and**
- 2. Submitted to his heavenly Father's will.**
- 3. He suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane – for us and for all mankind.**

The creeds we use in our worship services are pretty brief when they speak of Jesus' suffering and death. The Apostles' Creed simply confesses that Jesus Christ "suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried." The Nicene Creed says that he "was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried". But the Gospels spend about 20 percent of their pages talking about the last two days of Jesus' life and the Resurrection, the climax of his suffering and death. Although we read only one of four lessons which contain the Scriptural basis for our sermon, the other three are listed as Scripture lessons for this sermon.

After spending time with his disciples in the upper room, Jesus and his disciples went to the place called the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem. This wasn't so surprising since Jesus had gone there before with his disciples to pray. They had just celebrated the Last Passover and the First Lord's Supper. *"Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it."* John 18:1 (NIV)

Tonight we look briefly at the agony of his soul.

"On reaching the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you will not fall into temptation.'" He told his disciples "Sit here while I go over there and pray." Notice that he told them to pray, too.

He took Peter and James and John with him and went a little further into the garden. These are the same apostles who previously had witnessed his exaltation on the Mount of Transfiguration and now would see his great humiliation and suffering here in the garden.

As a true man, he wanted company in this hour of great terror and agony. We read *"He began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,' he said to them. 'Stay here and keep watch.'" With such a strong plea, you would think that they would be especially attentive to him.*

Notice that he asks for company. But none of them, no man can help him. He really must suffer alone for sin, for the sins of all mankind.

Then, *"Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'" He is pleading with his heavenly Father for an alternative to what he must now do.*

He knows what is coming. But his death must happen. He was a human who would have to die. This was necessary because God had spoken to Adam and Eve in another garden. ***“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”*** Genesis 2:15-17 (NIV)

Until the moment they ate of that tree, Adam and Eve had not known death. All of creation had not known death, for man and all living beings were to eat only green things, vegetation, not meat, for that would involve the death of some living creature. Since then, all humans, every last one of them, had died and were destined to die an earthly, physical, temporal death.

But worse than temporal death was the condemnation of eternal death and damnation. Man was spiritually dead and would receive eternal damnation. God’s Word is clear about that and the fact that our sins and our guilt trouble us and remind us ***“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”*** Ephesians 2:1 (NIV)

Jesus Christ, as true man, had to suffer and experience death, including that eternal death. But as the sinless Son of God and also a true man, he did it in our place, for us, for all mankind, so that we might be rescued from eternal death, so that we might be spared separation forever from God and everlasting punishment because our sins.

But he prayed to his Father, ***“Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.”*** He is looking for an alternative to fulfilling this will of God. But he submits to God’s will: ***“Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*** ***‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.’***

Notice how even God’s only-begotten Son submitted to the heavenly Father’s will. And isn’t that exactly what we are asking – that we submit to the will of our heavenly Father every time we pray “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”!

I personally find it really strange that artists often portray a calm, serene Jesus praying in the moonlight in the garden of Gethsemane – with a serene, peaceful face. That is not really the way it was. This was a time of the very greatest agony and pain for Jesus. Scripture is really very brief. But the suffering was not. Many books have been written which go into agonizing detail about the horrible sufferings and death of Jesus, including his agony in the Garden. But in the short time of this sermon we can only briefly summarize this awful struggle, a conflict so terrible that we may never have an adequate conception of it. In addition, we also wish to tell you only what the Word of God tells us.

Remember, he said ***“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”***

He had to do it alone. He, the sinless one, is the only one who could be our substitute in paying for all our sins, and all the sins of all mankind.

He is in such anguish that he is near death from terror. In his great high-priestly prayer in the upper room recorded in John’s gospel, his soul was filled with heavenly light and peace. But now his whole being is troubled and in agony. Of course, he was aware of all that would happen to him in the next 24 hours, in fact, less than 24 hours. But we must not forget the role that Satan had during Jesus’ agony in Gethsemane. Immediately after this time of agony and suffering, when he was about to be captured, he told his enemies ***“this is your hour--when darkness reigns.”*** Luke 22:53 (NIV)

We dare not neglect the greatest cause of his terror and anguish. It was death, with everything that death brings. Death was completely alien, foreign to his divinity, for he was also the Son of God. Every human shudders at the fear of death. Every human knows that he or she must experience death. But for Jesus, the sinless Son of God, death was the most unnatural thing that could happen to him.

In addition, his death was a vicarious death. He was our substitute. He would experience death not for himself, but for all mankind. He would experience death as the wages of sin, not his own sin, but all sins of all mankind. It was God’s anger with sin that was poured out on him, that he suffered, both here in private and publicly on the cross. No one could realize the meaning of death more than Jesus.

And we must realize that Satan had now been given permission to not just tempt him, but to enter into mortal combat with the one who came as the second Adam. Satan knew that Jesus had come to fight with him,

to win all mankind back from the power of the devil, and to destroy his power. If Satan were to lose against Jesus, Satan would be utterly destroyed. If Satan were to lose, he would no longer have power over all men. All these things make this an epic struggle between good and evil, between God and the devil.

This is the only instance recorded in Scripture when Jesus fell on his face in prayer. He fell on the ground in the greatest agony and anxiety of his soul.

He prays ***“Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.”*** It seems that he feels it is impossible for him to drink this terrible, horrible, dreaded cup of suffering. He almost forgets the necessity of his suffering. But he does not refuse to go the way the Father ordained. There is nothing in this plea that casts a shadow upon his holiness or his sinlessness.

One writer said that “He fell on the ground in the inexpressible agony of his soul.” But there is no comfort from his companions, his disciples. They are sleeping! If only he could have heard at least one word of comfort and sympathy from them! Three times he went and prayed, returning to his disciples after each prayer session.

Satan no doubt played a big part in helping them sleep. Jesus admonished them ***“Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?”*** Then he warns them again: ***“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”*** And so it is with every one of us. The new man within us is willing, and wants to do the will of God, but the flesh, the old man, the old Adam is weak.

His Father sends help. ***“An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”*** Jesus’ anguish is so terrible that the stress forced blood out through the pores of his skin along with his sweat. This terrible kind of stress is unusual, but not impossible. Such stress could cause one – a normal human – to die. But that is not the kind of death the Father had planned for him.

But the Father does send help in the form of an angel. Just as the ministering spirits came to serve him in the desert after the three great temptations, so now an angel serves him here. We read in the letter to the Hebrews that ***“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.”*** Hebrews 5:7-8 (NIV)

This was the height of his fear, anguish and agony in the garden. His sweat became like large drops of blood, which fell to the ground. But as he prayed, his strength returned. Gradually the attacks of death and the devil became weaker. He was ready to take the cup out of the hand of his heavenly Father and to drain it to the last dregs. He arose from his long battle of prayer; but when he came to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow. Mere flesh and blood had not been able even to witness the scene of such agony. He awakened them from their sleep, with sadness over Peter’s inability to watch with him for even one hour. He told them that this was no time to sleep. Instead they should arise and pray, lest they enter into temptation.

Jesus entered into his Passion willingly. Here at Gethsemane our Savior was seized with the terror of death. He battled the devil with prayer. His very blood was driven through his pores by the intensity and stress of his suffering, but he also gained the strength and courage bravely to face further suffering.

His words to his disciples are also a warning for us: ***“Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. ‘Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.’”***

Two opposing forces are about to clash: The power of Satan and the power of God. Jesus and Judas. The Son of God and the son of perdition. And so we begin our study of Scripture again to review the Passion, the great suffering of our Savior. He did all this for you, and for all mankind, so that whoever believes and accepts this might live eternally. May God preserve us all! Amen.