

Good Friday Chief Service
7 April, Anno Domini 2023
St. John 18:1-19:42

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Beloved of God,

“Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” Such faithfulness to God! Such faithfulness to you! This would certainly be the time to resist. These soldiers of the devil have come to destroy the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus’ arrest and trial and condemnation were completely unjust and everyone knew it from Judas to Pilate and everyone in between. Surely this can’t be God’s plan! Why doesn’t Jesus hide Himself from these villains? Why doesn’t He resist this evil? How will the kingdom of Israel be restored? What will become of all that Jesus began to do and to teach? Where are the legions of angels? Where is the Father’s deliverance of His beloved Son? “Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

Jesus’ prayer of just a few minutes ago is being answered. The Father is making clear His will not just for Jesus but for the whole world, His will for you. He will not spare Jesus. He will not take the cup away. This IS the will of the Father being carried out. “The Son of Man goes as it is written...” Isaiah says it perhaps the most beautifully: “Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; He has put Him to grief.”

Thus, the Lamb of God willingly steps forward to meet His captors and His murderers. He is not afraid because nothing matters more to Him than drinking the cup His Father gives. He is sorrowful to the point of death. He sweat great drops of blood in His agony. But, He is not afraid because He believes the promises of His Father. He makes sure that everything happens that needs to happen for Him to die on the cross. Every question He answers, every false accusation He silently bears, every blow is ordered by God to carry out one thing - our salvation. This is has always been the will of the Father. This is just as it was written of the Christ in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms. Jesus will drink the cup of God’s righteous wrath because He and the Father don’t want you to drink it.

There is nothing more glorious to consider than that Jesus had every opportunity to avoid the suffering and death His Father laid on Him but He never took it. Instead, He marched unflinchingly toward it like a lamb led to the slaughter, embracing it. We certainly don't do that. We run from the crosses of God's will like they're the plague. All of us, at heart, are theologians of glory. We flee from the cross, both Jesus' and our own, because they put me to death. We don't want to be nothing. We don't want to suffer and sacrifice. We spend our entire lives trying desperately to be something before the world and before God. We want to drink from the cup of the world's pleasure because it's all about me and what I want. "Not God's will, but mine be done" is the mantra of the flesh. "I want to nurse my anger. I want to coddle my ego with "me time". I want to indulge my dreams and selfish desires while my family languishes and suffers." We torture ourselves trying to figure out what important thing we are supposed to accomplish, what mark we are supposed to leave on the world, somehow to make sure that we are remembered forever, how we can have the glory and praise of the world.

But that's not what the cross does. It shows me to be a lost and condemned sinner and all my supposedly good works to be rubbish. It shows me that I can't do anything even remotely good apart from the mercy of Jesus. The cross shows me that my glory is the very thing that destroys me and sets me as an enemy of God. The cross reveals just how wretchedly vain I am as the Son of God hung naked on the cross, brutalized and pierced, selflessly laying down His life for me while I sigh at even the prospect of being inconvenienced or denied what I want.

Every ounce of glory we take for ourselves only and always robs Christ of what is rightly His. And in doing that we rob ourselves of the comfort and peace Jesus bled and died to win for us. Consequently, in our quest for glory, we avoid those who are hurting, whose lives are filled with sin and pain. We find them annoying and inconvenient. We only help them begrudgingly because we wouldn't want others thinking poorly of us. Rather than bear their crosses with them, rather than hold the Jesus of Golgotha before them, we cruelly lead them to believe that such things are unbecoming of Christians. "You shouldn't hurt. You shouldn't be sad." We leave them crushed, lying in the ditch as though Jesus would have them pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and do better. We leave the anxious, the depressed, the despairing to drown. We withhold mercy and

forgiveness and, like the foolish servant, demand impossible things from our neighbor, things that we ourselves could never do or be.

Repent. Glory belongs to God alone. And His glory is not to crush rebellious, murderous, loveless sinners. His glory is not to exalt Himself over us or cast us into the fires of judgment like we deserve. It was to crush His Son in your place instead. It was to lay your stripes on His back and drive your guilt through His hands and feet. It was to crown Him with the thorns of shame and dishonor. Throughout the ministry of Jesus we see that God's glory looks absolutely nothing like the glory of men. God's glory isn't His own greatness and power. God's glory is humility, self-sacrifice, and weakness. It is His love for you. His glory is your salvation. Christ's Passion was never about Himself. He didn't care about that at all. He personally received no benefit from His death and resurrection. His entire person and life was spent to benefit sinners like you and me, sinners like Caiaphas and Pilate, sinners like the soldiers who scourged Him and crucified Him, sinners like Peter who denied Him and Judas who betrayed Him.

Behold this day in these bitter, dark, and seemingly hopeless hours, the brilliant light of true heavenly glory! Behold the Son glorifying the Father and the Father glorifying His Son by hanging Him from the accursed tree, laying on Him all your sins and making Him your Savior and your glory. Not one single drop of God's cup of wrath against us was withheld from Jesus. Set aside your pride and desire for glory. Set aside the impossible burden of thinking that God needs you to be or do anything. Rejoice in your weakness because the less of me and my glory there is, the more glory there is for Jesus. "It is finished." That is what He said. You are saved. There is no other glory to be had. There is no greater glory that you could be given. It is God's great glory to baptize you into the death of His Son that His death would be your own and that you would be raised to newness of life. You are God's child. There is nothing more or greater that you could ever be.

All praise, honor, and glory to Jesus who drank the cup of our sin and death to the very last drop, just as His Father willed. By drinking the bitter dregs of the cup His Father appointed to Him, Christ our dear Lord has filled the cup of the New Testament, the cup of Holy Communion, with all life and peace and joy and comfort and healing and every other blessing of God the Father that He would lavish on us. Here is God's answer to your

fear, to sickness, and to death. Here, the fruit of Good Friday is given to us that we might partake of Jesus who died and who now, having conquered our sin and our death, has been raised to new and eternal life. Here in this precious sacrament weak, hurting, sorrowing, and inglorious sinners taste the very love of God they long for.

Beloved children of God, behold the man, Jesus of Nazareth, drinking the cup appointed for Him on Calvary's cross that He may pour out the cup of His life and love to you to eat and to drink for the strengthening and preserving of your body and soul unto life everlasting.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer