**Matthew 26:17-30 April 9, 2020**

**Maundy Thursday**

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

If I were to challenge you tonight to envision in your mind, the day of Holy Week that is best associated with blood, which day would you think of? I’m guessing Palm Sunday which we just observed this past Sunday, the great entrance of Jesus Christ riding on a humble donkey, doesn’t come to mind. Easter Sunday, Christ’s glorious resurrection from the dead is not really associated with blood either. So which one do you see? Maundy Thursday, or Good Friday? I’m guessing that the majority of those who have seen Mel Gibson’s the Passion of the Christ would lean toward Good Friday. The very fact that The Passion of the Christ didn’t shy away from showing a bloody and a battered Jesus Christ, was why it was such a controversial film when it first came out. The blood, was what people remembered. In a lot of ways, Good Friday could be renamed, Bloody Friday because of the extensive pain that Christ went through, scourged to the point of death, blood pouring down his face from a crown of thorns, and finally blood shooting from his wrists and his feet when He is nailed to the cross. Good Friday seems to be the bloody spectacle of Holy Week, but tonight, I’m going to challenge you to see Maundy Thursday as having an even stronger association with blood. Because it is the blood, that Christ points to in His institution of the Lord’s Supper, that marks the beginning of a new covenant. And it is in the blood of Jesus Christ, that we find life, mercy, His love, and our salvation.

It shouldn’t be surprising that Maundy Thursday would have some association with blood, after all the disciples come to Jesus asking where they will eat the Passover meal. Passover is all about blood; the blood of an innocent lamb, that saved the Israelites from death. Passover was an observance of a great act of mercy, shown by God, to spare the firstborn sons of the Israelites from the terrible plague of the angel of death. It was the blood that was smeared on the doorposts of the house to mark that place as one that was set apart. The blood signified that this was a house that was sanctified and made holy, and a house that would avoid death.

Maundy Thursday is all about blood, sacrificial blood that saves us from death, and sacrificial blood that comes from one who is innocent, and blameless. Blood that comes from the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. But the blood is shed for those who are far from blameless in the sight of God. The blood is shed, for the betrayers. Those who fallen into temptation. Those who led themselves into temptation, and failed in the moments when Satan was tempting them. It’s shed for the sinful and unclean. Blood and betrayal, that’s what this night is all about. The blood that was given to Christ’s disciples, out of love and mercy, and to form a new covenant, and the blood that was soon going to be poured out because Jesus was betrayed and handed over to the guards who beat him, scourged him, and nailed him to the cross. The blood was to come, because of the betrayer who sat among them. A betrayer who shows himself in the way that He addresses the Son of God. If you look closely at Matthew chapter 26 you see that when Jesus Christ says “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” The disciples become sorrowful, and look to Jesus and ask him “Is it I, *Lord*? All of them address Him as Lord except for one. Judas Iscariot. The one who addresses him simply as “Rabbi” or teacher. After all this time he still saw Jesus as nothing more than a teacher of the people. And later, when Judas brings a mob to arrest Jesus, it is with the title of “Rabbi” that he betrays the Son of God.

The betrayal led to the blood, the blood that had to be poured out for the sins of the betrayers. Looking throughout the Passion of Jesus Christ, we see a complete list of characters that could be blamed for the blood of Jesus Christ. Judas Iscariot comes first to mind, for he hands Jesus over in his betrayal. And finally after seeing that Christ was condemned, Judas went back to the chief priests and declared that He had betrayed innocent *blood*. Judas felt the guilt of his betrayal and in a way he saw the money that he was given as blood money. The blood was on his hands, and he went away in anguish and ultimately hung himself. The chief priests couldn’t even bring themselves to keep the money, they called it “blood money”. Matthew continually brings up this word blood when he talks about the Passion of Jesus Christ, and the events that took place in His trial and His finally his crucifixion. Judas, was guilty of the blood of Christ for his betrayal, but so were the chief priests who conspired against the Son of God and charged him with blasphemy that would be punishable by death. The blood was also on their hands. Even though Pontius Pilate finally washes his hands in front of the crowd and says “I am innocent of this man’s *blood*.” He gave the order. He was more concerned about his political office, than an innocent man’s life. And the crowds who had chanted for Christ when He entered Jerusalem and hailed Him as the Messiah, now chanted for blood. They chant “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” and upon Pilate washing his hands of Jesus’ blood they respond by saying “His blood be on us and our children.” They welcomed the blood of Jesus Christ upon their own hands. Blood, Blood, Blood, that’s all we hear over and over again. We cannot escape this Word when it comes to the Passion of Jesus Christ.

And if we were to be honest with ourselves, we cannot escape the truth, that Christ’s blood is also on our hands. Blood and betrayal, those are the two things that we talk about here on Maundy Thursday, and the truth is we are guilty of both. Our betrayal has led to Christ’s blood being shed. Because all sin is a betrayal of God. All sin is a choice to turn from what we know is right, and betray God by doing what we know is wrong and giving in to temptation. Sin is us putting our trust in something else other than God’s Word to make us happy and fulfilled in this life. That is a betrayal of the promises of God. That is a betrayal of the teaching that we have received as God’s Children in His Word. That is a betrayal of the gifts that He has given to us in His Holy Sacraments. It is turning away from God and turning instead to the Devil and his promises of happiness. And no matter how many excuses we make, that Christ’s blood is not on our hands, because it’s Judas’s fault, and the Chief Priests, and the Romans, or the Jews, or really Adam and Eve who brought sin into this world in the first place. We still betray God when we sin, and we all have sinned. We cannot pass the buck. We cannot wash away His blood from our hands. We are sinners. And sin must be paid for. Paid for not with gold, or silver, but as Luther puts it in the Second Article of the creed, but with blood.

Blood is the payment. It should be our blood that was paid for our sin. But sadly, our blood could not pay the price. For we are not perfect. In the Old Testament it was a lamb without blemish or defect, the blood of the animal was used to atone for sin. A lamb just like the ones used in the Passover. Its blood would bring about forgiveness. But even all the blood of beasts, and bulls, and lambs could not atone for one sin on their own. Because that blood pointed to the all atoning sacrifice of the perfect Lamb of God. It was Christ’s blood, his holy, precious blood, that purchased and won us from all sin.

In our old Testament lesson we see Moses sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice on the people. In Exodus chapter 24 Moses takes the blood and throws it on the people and says “Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with these words.” The blood of the covenant was upon the people, and that covenant continued until this moment that we remember tonight. Because this is the moment, where we see, the culmination of that promise of God, to send a Savior. We see, Jesus Christ sitting before His disciples and instituting a new covenant. A covenant that was not talking about the flesh and blood of animals that pointed to a final sacrifice to come. He was bringing about a new covenant in His own blood.

Because the truth is His blood is upon us. His blood is on our hands, but He willingly gave himself up to death, in order to save us. He willingly went to the cross, to suffer and die, so that we would not have to. And he willingly gives us His body and blood to eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins. That is what he promises us. When Jesus took bread and said “Take, eat, this is my body” and when he took the cup and said “Drink of it all of you, this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” He means exactly what he says. He institutes for us, a celebration of His body and His blood, where we receive just that, for our forgiveness, and we know without a shadow of a doubt that the bread and the wine that we receive are what Christ himself says that they are. We know that life and salvation are found in these elements because Christ promises that they are there.

His blood saves us from death. Where in the past we may have looked and seen the blood of Jesus Christ and saw only guilt and shame because it was poured out because of our sin, now we can look and see it as a sign of His love. Because we are forgiven, and washed clean, in the blood of the Lamb of God. We are redeemed by His sacrifice on the cross, and we are His children, partaking in His holy Sacrament for the forgiveness of our sins.

While the disciples and Jesus came together, to celebrate the Passover lamb who was slain and saved the lives of the Israelites, tonight we come together even though we are far apart. We come together to praise the Holy blood of Jesus Christ, poured out for us, to save us from our sins. And we celebrate a new covenant, a covenant made in His blood, that assures us that salvation has come in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Who rode in to Jerusalem on a donkey, to die. Who reclined and instituted Holy Communion, to provide for the needs of His people. Which is still offered to you, just on an individual basis until we are able to meet again. And who finally, was nailed to a cross and breathed his last, to save His people from their sins. May we together meditate on God’s goodness, and come together as His people, to praise the blood that saves us from sin.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.

Amen.