Maundy Thursday Sermon — 03/28/24

Text — Mark 14:36

*“*Abba, Father,” Jesus said, “everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.”

Theme — “This Cup”

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As I am sure you all remember from your confirmation days, the Savior HAD to be both God and man. Man, so that He could take our place in keeping and satisfying the Law for us. God, so that His work would be sufficient for all humanity — a mere man (even a perfect and sinless one) could not save anyone but himself. And nowhere is this “two natures of Christ” more evident than here, on Maundy Thursday in the Garden of Gethsemane. In Christ’s prayers there, part of which we have just heard in our text.

You all know the setting. It is Maundy Thursday night. Immediately after the Last Supper (which we heard about in our Gospel lesson). There, Jesus had instituted the Lord’s Supper, giving the Twelve to eat of His Body and Blood in/with/under the bread and wine. We’ll come back to that a little later in this sermon, but for now we will proceed with Jesus and the Eleven (Judas having left to join the mob who would soon arrest our Lord) to the Mount of Olives. To the garden there, called Gethsemane. A place where Jesus apparently regularly went to pray in solitude and peace when He was in Jerusalem.

When they get to the garden (a park-like setting), Jesus leaves all but Peter, James, and John at the entrance. He takes those three disciples — His closest, dearest friends — and goes a bit further into the garden. Then He leaves them and goes a “*stone’s throw away”* so that He can pray by Himself. Jesus knows full well what will soon happen. He knows that Judas will come with his posse to arrest Him. He knows Judas will betray Him with a kiss. He knows Peter will draw his sword to defend his Master. He knows that Peter and the rest will all desert Him and run away when He meekly hands Himself over to their custody. He knows the trials which await Him — before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, before Pilate, before Herod, and then back to Pilate again. He knows the verdict has already been fore-ordained. He knows He will be mocked and ridiculed, beaten and spat upon, tortured and flogged. He knows all about the crown of thorns, the spikes that will be pounded into His hands and feet. He knows about the agonies and excruciating physical pain He will endure on the cross. But infinitely more, He knows the hell — the literal **hell** — He will have to shoulder as He carries all the sin, of all people, there. And it is enough to make even Jesus shudder.

Yes, Jesus IS God. He knows all that will happen. He knows why. He knows that THIS is the whole reason He has come. Why He was born. Why He preached and taught and did miracles for the past three years. He knows there is no other way — He MUST suffer and die. He MUST take our hell. He knows everything. Because He is God.

But He is also true man. And that means He staggers at the weight of all that will soon come crashing down upon Him. And so He is tempted. If Satan was there in the wilderness at the start of Jesus’ public ministry, after His baptism by John in the Jordan River — and he most certainly was — then how much more so here, in Gethsemane! Then Satan had enticed Jesus with all sorts of things, trying to get Him to turn aside from going this road to the cross. But now, with the magnitude of it all staring Him squarely in the face — less than 24 hours away —how much more intensely was Satan now tempting Him! If ever we are given proof of Jesus’ humanity, it is right here in Gethsemane.

Yes, I know the catechism in its proof texts of Jesus’ humanity give things like the fact that He ate and drank, that He laughed and cried, that He grew tired and weary. And that is all true. They DO prove His true humanity. But I think it is here, in this prayer, that we see its greatest proof. For here, Jesus does what is most human — He prays. (pause)

*“Abba, Father,” Jesus said, “everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.”*

First, Jesus calls upon His Father. Yes, Jesus is the eternal Son and so it makes perfect sense to address the First Person of the Trinity with that name. The Father IS His Father in a way like no other can claim. From eternity, He is the Son. But as a Man, this name also invokes a special relationship. Mankind was made to be God’s children. We are the crown of His creation, the delight of His heart, the apple of His eye. All things were made for us — the sun and moon and stars, the mountains and rivers and trees, the animals, even the angels were made to serve us. That is why it hurt God so much when Adam sinned and turned his back on his heavenly Father. And why it hurts Him so much when WE sin, when WE ignore Him, when WE go our own way. But Jesus shows His true humanity — the humanity He restores to us — when He calls God *“Abba, Father”*.

Next, Jesus acknowledges God’s infinite power — *“All things are possible for You”.* Such can only be said of God. But it is more than just a statement of fact — it is also a confession of faith. Even when confronted with a truly impossible situation — the hell He is about to suffer — still Jesus trusts His Father. All things ARE possible with God. Even the impossible, insoluble problem of our sin. Sin demands punishment. Sin demands hell. God has always said so. Back in Eden. On Mount Sinai. Here in Gethsemane. And most of all, at Mount Calvary. But the Good News is that God says He will suffer that punishment for us.

However, Jesus is true Man. And God’s solution to the problem of sin means that He, Jesus, will have to endure it all for us. And that causes Him to shake under its weight. He prays to His Father to *“take this cup”* of suffering from Him. It seems too much. Even for God-in-the-flesh. St. Luke tells us that this knowledge of what He would have to suffer caused Jesus to pray with such intensity and fervency that He sweated *“great drops as of blood”*. How could the Father ask such a sacrifice of His Only-Begotten Son? Isn’t there some OTHER way? You can almost see and hear the devil at Jesus’ ear, whispering doubts and questions and lies to Him. In Eden, Satan had told Adam and Eve that God was holding out on them. That He was NOT their loving Father who had given them everything. Here, he tells Jesus that His Father must not love Him, must not be powerful enough to conquer sin, and that Jesus should avoid taking the punishment of others — “Let this cup of suffering pass, Jesus. It is not Yours. Let someone else drink it.”

Yes, Jesus IS Man. But He is perfect Man. And so He withstands the temptation. He trusts His Father. He submits to His Father’s will. He WILL drink that cup. Because it is the only way. And so, Man (in the person of Jesus) finally obeys God. Man resists the devil. Man fully trusts his Father — despite all appearances of the Father’s failure to care, to save, to love. Jesus drains that cup of sorrow and suffering. He takes up our burden of sin. He carries it to the cross. He suffers our hell. He dies our death. He gives US what He has won. Man triumphs — because Jesus is Man. (pause)

I said at the beginning of the sermon that I would be returning to the Lord’s Supper and the cup that Jesus gives us there. And so I shall. That night, that Maundy Thursday night, the same night in which He was betrayed, Jesus took bread and cup and said:

“Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me…Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

That cup of Christ’s suffering is given to you every time you come forward to this communion rail. Here — in/with/under the bread and wine — are given YOU the very Body and Blood which have won forgiveness and life for you. Everything that Jesus did is right here. This bread. This cup.

How can that be, some wonder. How can bread be the Body of Christ? How can wine be the Blood of Jesus? How can they give forgiveness of sins, strengthening of faith, and life everlasting? Well, remember Jesus’ prayer — ALL things are possible with God. Just as we are certain that He has lived for us, keeping the commandments and giving us the credit. Just as we are certain that He has died for us, paying for all our sins. Just as we are certain that He has risen for us, giving us everlasting life with Him. So too are we certain that He gives us all that here. In the Body and Blood which purchased and won it all for us.

This cup of communion is bound and connected and joined to the cup of suffering that Christ drank for us. And so we come forward in faith. Trusting Him, God and Man for us, who has promised. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Offertory/Offering