

In Nomine Iesu

Holy Week - Maundy Thursday 2025 Real Presence, Real Forgiveness – Matthew 26:17-29

“Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?’ He said, ‘Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, “The Teacher says, ‘My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’”’ And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. When it was evening, he reclined at the table with the twelve. And as they were eating, he said, ‘Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, ‘Is it I, Lord?’ He answered, ‘He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.’ Judas, who would betray him, answered, ‘Is it I, Rabbi?’ He said to him, ‘You have said so.’ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to his disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you, **for** this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for You, O God.” (Psalm 42:1) Here we see the world through God’s own eyes. The child of God pictured as a deer, has run and run, fleeing from its hunter. It has momentarily escaped. Now tired and winded, thirsty and utterly exhausted, it searches for water to quench its thirst so it can go on.

The whole human race is running like the deer, fleeing from the most cunning hunter of all - death. He is an expert, relentlessly stalking his prey. He keeps his victims on the move, tiring them, keeping each away from water lest it drink and become strengthened and escape his arrows. Only God can intervene with this hunter, who stalks us day and night. Because death is always on the prowl, we need the Savior God sent into the world to abide with us, protect us, refresh us, and give us the strength to escape.

It is just here the Psalmist laments, “My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, ‘Where is your God?’” Later he cries out, “‘Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?’ As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’” Every mature Christian has experienced in some way what the psalmist describes.

During Holy Week we are once again reminded of the final events in Christ’s work of redeeming the world from sin, death, and the devil. It is a wonderful time of the church year. Yet, at the same time, we can find ourselves as uncertain as were the disciples on that first Maundy Thursday. They were afraid for their lives; the hunter was closing in. They were like the winded thirsty deer, panting for water. They had

Christ, the living God, right there with them, from whom their souls could drink in the Word. Yet they would soon be separated from Him, as Jesus said, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” (John 13:36)

We are separated from Christ by 19 1/2 centuries. Countless tragedies have taken place in the world and in our lives. The Christian can say with the psalmist, “My tears have been my food day and night.” The devil, our fierce enemy, stalks us by tempting us to despair, slyly whispering to us, “How could your God let you suffer? The world laughs you to scorn saying, “You Christians have no better a life than we. If anything your life is more oppressive. You can’t even do the things we do.” The world mocks us, saying, “Where is your God?” And so often our flesh succumbs and cries out to God: “Why have you forgotten me?” Has God forgotten us? Is our faith in this Jesus of 2000 years ago just an empty thing? Is there no relief from the hunter? Where is our God?

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: “Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Mt 28:20) Certainly this shows that Christ has promised to be with his dear disciples . But **where is He** to be found to help? Where is our God? It is right here that so many Christians wander off into the wilderness on their own. They go searching for God **where He has not said** he could be found. They look for him in their own dreams, struggles, imaginations, and meditations. For them the Christian faith becomes fuzzy and vague until either despair sets in or a false sense of security, as they no longer can answer the question with certainty, “Where is your God? Where is your help found?”

Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Me.” There is no other access to God’s grace except by the bridge that is Jesus Christ. Wherever Christ is, there is your God, for “in him the whole fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.” So, we have at least a partial answer to the question the psalmist asks, “Where is your God?” He is where Christ, the incarnate God is.

But we ask, “Where is Christ?” Clearly, he is not to be found in the same way today as the disciples had Him. We will not find Him calling to us to cast our net on the other side as He once did to Peter, Andrew, James and John as they fished on the sea. We will not find Him in that way because He was crucified, died, was buried, rose again on the third day and thereafter ascended into heaven. So, where can we seek and find Him. In our heart? No. To be sure, He said that He would live in the heart of every believer, **but He told no one to seek Him there.** Nor did He promise He would or could be found there. So where do we look? Where will we find Him?

Here Martin Luther made a brilliant observation: “When I need forgiveness, I do not go to the cross because I will not find it there.” Isn’t that shocking? How can he say that? He goes on, “How can you get to the cross? It is no longer there. And even if it were there, Christ has long since gone from there. No, I do not go to the cross. I run to Absolution or the Sacrament. Why? Because this is where the cross is distributed.” Then He makes this profound statement: “We speak in two ways about the forgiveness of sins: one, where forgiveness of sins is acquired and two, where it is distributed. You must not confuse these two - they are quite different.” On the cross Christ won our forgiveness. He won

it there – two thousand years ago, on the other side of the ocean; He purchased us there, “not with gold or silver, but with His holy. Precious blood and innocent suffering and death.” He won our salvation there. And there He cried out, “It is finished.” But He **does not distribute** forgiveness, life and salvation there.

“Where is your God?” Where is He with His forgiveness and help? Where is He to sustain you? He is where He told His disciples He would be. He is to be found wherever the Gospel in the Word and Sacrament are. Just as there is no other way to God except through Christ, so there is no other way to find Christ except in these things, the means of grace, which He Himself established and in which He promised to be with us.

Consider as we close today, what we heard from St. Matthew’s gospel, “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to his disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you, **for** this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. “Drink of it, all of you, for – **because!** – this is My blood.” This is His blood poured out for us for the forgiveness of sins – our sins! Can there be any doubt that where Christ’s body and blood are, **He is, He Himself is here for us!** He is present here and now - where we are! - with all our disappointments and sorrows, burdened with sin and guilt. And He brings with Him all the blessings He won for us then and there on the cross. He is here to assure you and me, “Your sins are forgiven You. I have borne them in My own body. I have poured out My blood to take them away from you forever. Here I am, just as I promised.

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Do you believe this? Then you are **worthy**, even as St. Paul says, because God has made you worthy through faith in the all-sufficient sacrifice of His beloved Son. He forgives all your sins, calls you a citizen of heaven, and welcomes you into the family of Christ, who has done it all for you. He joins Himself to you and to each other. You who gather together at this altar to partake of the Supper of the Lamb make a united and bold confession: He who died at Calvary, **died for all people**. He who rose again, rose again to bring freedom and life **to all people**. He who speaks this truth, speaks truth **to all people**. And He says, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me ... This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Come then to the table of the Lord, who has won your salvation and here and now gives that salvation to you. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria