

164. Palm Sunday – I

*“Let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them;
Let those also who love Your name Be joyful in You.” [Psa 5:11]*

Matthew 21:1–9 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.” All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: “Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. And a very great multitude spread their garments on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ Hosanna in the highest!”

A human king is distinguished from others by highness and splendor; Christ is distinguished by lowliness and meekness. The world’s princes win battles with their people’s blood; Christ, with His own blood. Other rulers ascend so high to win power and dominion for themselves; Christ descends a thousand times deeper to win glory and salvation for us. Isn’t He high and great then? Doesn’t He have power and glory?

He upholds all things with the Word of His power [*Heb 1:3*], and all the heavenly hosts worship Him. It is not by reason of lack of power that He is the lowest, but by reason of almighty power and infinite love. Yet His lowliness is in no way a sham and feigned meekness. He has really humbled Himself. He descended so deep to slay our enemies and to deliver us up from death. His kingdom is not of this world; not earthly, but heavenly; not physical, but spiritual goods He gives us. Meekness, gentleness, patience, love, mercy, peace, and eternal salvation are His gifts to His people.

He makes His royal entrance by entering Jerusalem to suffer death. So it must be. By His death on the cross He shall destroy the devil’s power and establish His own kingdom. He comes now to uplift and draw all to Himself (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32). It is done. He was crucified, and He has ascended up to the right hand of the Father. He is seated on God’s royal throne with all power in heaven and on earth, and yet He stands among us with mildness and gentleness. All who believe in Him are rescued from the power of darkness and live in the power of the kingdom where mercy and gentleness bear the scepter, “where mercy and truth have met together and righteousness and peace have kissed each other” [*Psa 85:10*]. This grace we receive now *in faith*. Blessed for us is His Palm Sunday entry, when He came and was made a sin-offering. Blessed for us is His gracious power over sin and all evil in our poor hearts. But we shall be able to see Him again. He shall still make His entrance, so blessed for the faithful that the joy shall never end for eternity.

Meanwhile we thank You for Your royal entry on Palm Sunday. We greet You as the King of our hearts, worship You as our God, and humbly beseech You for grace: to lay ourselves down before Your feet, with all that we are and all that we have. Take and use it, Lord Jesus, to spread Your kingdom. Take us with You on the way of the cross, and use us in everything for the victory of Your truth and grace on earth. Amen.

*’Tis He who for thee offers
His holy, precious blood.
’Tis He who for thee proffers
A blessed saving flood.*

O Jesus, make me worthy
Somehow to give Thee praise;
O help me and prepare me
My voice to Thee to raise.

With willing, all my treasure
I lay aside for Thee,
To join the throng unmeasured
Who praise Thee gratefully.

My palms I freely bring Thee,
O King of glory of mine;
My hymns I gladly sing Thee,
Jesus, Thine ear incline.

Hosannas are resounding
With Thy good Spirit dear;
My heart with joy is bounding,
With godly, holy cheer.

What joy and what great wonder
The King of glory wrought;
My death Thou troddest under;
To Thee all thanks be brought.

*Kingo: Se, hvor nu Jesus træder L 300:10-14 tr. DeGarmeaux; tune: O Jesus, for din Pine (LHy 479);
alternate hymn: Hail, Thou once-despised Jesus ELH 270:2*

165. Palm Sunday – II

Lord Jesus, teach us to know You in Your humiliation and in Your exaltation. Amen.

Philippians 2:5–11 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Lord humbles Himself most deeply, for He shall fulfill what is in the name *Jesus* [*Savior*]. He will save us from the devil and free our hearts from sin, save us from eternal torment and make us eternally blessed, draw us up from the deepest humiliation and glorify us with heavenly glory. Therefore He denied Himself the use of His glory and became the lowest and poorest servant. Since God's Son became Man, He should naturally be a divinely glorious Man. His divine splendor should gleam in His whole human nature. But He denied Himself this likeness of deity, put off His glory, and was humbled in the likeness of sinful flesh. Himself pure from sin, He bears our sin with all its consequences: poverty, hunger, pains, and death. But when He had suffered all and perfectly paid the price of sin and purchased us with His own life and blood, then He was glorified. And now the "*Son of Man*" is highly exalted, so that He rules over all things in heaven and on earth, and shall come at the last day to judge the living and the dead. God's Son lowered Himself incredibly deeply in poor human nature, incredibly high is Man exalted in personal union with God's Son. He does not simply save us from evil, but gives us all glory and salvation. It cost Him most dearly to prove His title to the name Jesus, which He both knew and willed from eternity. But this name is incredibly glorious for us. I could not possibly refrain from adoring it, and no one shall deny me of this privilege.

He shall be worshipped by all heavenly hosts eternally, and all the principalities and powers both in the height and the depth shall bow before Him. Because God is our Savior, because God's Son is called Jesus, we are so blessed. This name, which fills all heaven with joy, is the name of *our* Savior, whom we shall worship in eternal glory, and with whose sweetness we shall eternally satisfy our soul. We deserved to be the devil's footstool, and "Jesus" makes us like the "angels" at His throne. Shouldn't we then be willing, yes, glad, to endure lowliness and the cross for a little while and thus become like our Savior in meekness and love? "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus!" So begins our Epistle. So we say to one another in closing: "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus!*"

But we pray You, Lord Jesus, give us the grace of Your Holy Spirit to believe in You, so that we also shall be like You and worship You and confess Your precious name, here during tribulation and lowliness, but there in eternal glory and salvation. Amen.

Lord, all my life I'll cling to Thee,
Thy love fore'er beholding,
Thee ever, as Thou ever me,
With loving arms enfolding.
Yea, Thou shalt be my precious Light
To guide me safe through death's dark night,
My heart in sorrow cheering;
Henceforth myself and all I have
To Thee, my Savior, e'er I'll give,
Into Thy cause all pouring.

From morn till eve my theme shall be
Thy mercy's wondrous measure;
To sacrifice myself for Thee
Shall be my aim and pleasure.
My stream of life shall ever be
A current flowing ceaselessly,
Thy constant praise outpouring.
I'll treasure in my memory,
O Lord, all Thou hast done for me,
Thy gracious love adoring.

*Gerhardt: A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth L 305:5-6 ELH 331:5-6
tr. Composite ©1941 CPH. Used by permission; tune: An Wasserflüssen Babylon*

166. Monday in Holy Week

Lord, cleanse our hearts and prepare Your praise from our lips. Amen.

Matthew 21:10–16 And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" So the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee." Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?'"

Christ the gentle King is still very zealous against evil and does not tolerate the ungodly in His kingdom. As gently as He deals with the troubled who wish to be cleansed from sin, so sternly He drives out of His Church all self-confident,

unrepentant sinners. He doesn't break the bruised reed, but stiff-necked and proud men He topples to the ground. All who will not humble themselves must be cast out, for Christ's kingdom is the home of meekness, gentleness, and love. The blind and the lame He heals, and the Hosanna of children makes Him glad. But the money-changers and dove-peddlers He drives out with a sharp whip, and the proud scribes He admonishes with the two-edged sword of the Word. The temple of animal-sacrifices is torn down, and a temple of living stones is raised instead, a temple with worship in spirit and truth. Let us understand that only those who repent and become like little children belong to this house of God, only the meek and the believing, not at all those who are worldly minded, self-righteous, and self-important.

A great house has not only vessels of gold and silver, it also has vessels of wood and clay, but those for glory, and these for dishonor. Indeed the tares grow together with the wheat in the field until the harvest [*Mat 13:30*]. But they do not belong there, and the day is coming when they shall be separated from the wheat with merciless severity. Let each of us examine ourselves to see if our heart is bowed in meekness and cleansed in Jesus' blood, so that we may stand in the covenant of a good conscience with God and worship Him in spirit and truth. No one else will stand in the judgment. The Lord laid down His life [*1Jo 3:16*] to save us from the ways and works of the devil, and He let water and blood flow from His side as a cleansing for His own people [*Joh 19:34*]. Shall we then not seek after holiness and be zealous for good works? So now in the power of Christ's blood leave all the ways of darkness. Do not be unequally yoked with unbelief. Cleanse your soul in obedience to the truth, and let your heart be a holy temple, your whole life a pure worship of God in service to Him who is consumed with zeal for His Father's house!

Grant us such grace, merciful God, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

This treasure ever I'll employ,
This ev'ry aid shall yield me;
In sorrow it shall be my joy,
In conflict it shall shield me.
In joy, the music of my feast;
And when all else has lost its zest,
This manna still shall feed me;
In thirst my drink, in want my food,
My company in solitude,
To comfort and to lead me!

And when Thy glory I shall see
And taste Thy kingdom's pleasure,
Thy blood my royal robe shall be,
My joy beyond all measure;
When I appear before Thy throne,
Thy righteousness shall be my crown,
With these I need not hide me.
And there, in garments richly wrought
As Thine own bride, I shall be brought
To stand in joy beside Thee.

*Gerhardt: A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth L 305:7-8 ELH 331:8.10
tr. Composite ©1941 CPH. Used by permission.; tune: An Wasserflüssen Babylon*

167. Tuesday in Holy Week

*Lord, let us know the power of Your resurrection
and become partakers of Your suffering. Amen.*

John 12:23–32 But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground

and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.” Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him.” Jesus answered and said, “This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”

Jews and Greeks wanted to have earthly glory with Jesus. O aren’t we the same too? The desire of the old Adam is for worldly prestige, power, and pleasure. Let all who hold to Jesus examine themselves well to see if it is not such things they seek from Him! Let each and every one examine himself! “You will gladly go forth with Me as in a wedding procession. But to follow in danger—are you ready for that? You would gladly sit with Me in My Father’s kingdom, but to ascend there you must be better accustomed to the cross.”

Deny yourself, be humbled, hate your life in this world and lose it, be crucified and die; this is the way of Christ. He Himself went this way and He travels it in all His believers. Only in this way does He become our Savior, and only in this way do you have part in His sufferings and His glory. If He didn’t have to atone for our sins, and free us from the devil, then He would not have had to suffer the death of the cross and He could not have drawn us with Himself to heaven, if He had not been cut off from the land of the living. Through death and the grave He went to the Father and gathers to Himself a countless generation (Isaiah 53:8). Now the wheat bears much fruit. Now the cross has become the ladder to heaven [Gen 28:12], but *only* the cross is the ladder of heaven. Only the way of the cross is the way to heaven, otherwise there is no bridge from death to life.

This way of the cross to heaven’s glory is prepared for all people, as many as want may come. He wants to draw all to Himself — on the cross and on the throne of heaven. But whoever will not die with Him cannot live with Him. Our life on earth: our evil nature, all sinful desires in us, which Paul calls “the body of sin” (Romans 6:6), the combined force of evil desires, which has its life in self-will and its powers in pride and deceit—this worldly life in you must die if you shall live. Let it be sacrificed in God’s name. You are baptized into the death of Christ. Your old man is crucified with Him. Seriously try out the power of your baptism. If you believe in the Lord, then you truly have grace to mortify the flesh and to live a new life in Him. He also helps you with it very much during times of need and tribulation: afflictions, temptations, poverty, sickness, and pains. But the power itself comes from Jesus’ death and resurrection. From these the root of your new life springs forth and from them it must draw nourishment to grow. He gives the believers the strength of His death and His life in the Word and Sacraments, and through them we have grace indeed to mortify the flesh, take up the cross, and live for heaven. God, help us in this, so that we too may thus bear much fruit. Amen.

When Thou Thyself for me did offer,
Denied Thyself so tirelessly
And for my sinful guilt did suffer
The pains of soul deserved by me,
How could I then Thy grace abuse
And Thy salvation still refuse?

Help me in Thy will to be striding
In steadfastness and faithful love,
That nothing may be me dividing
From Thy sweet friendship from above,
Until my soul with holy cheer
May rest within Thy bosom dear.

O grant that I with Thee may suffer,
To bear Thy cross, the sweetest yoke,
And by Thy pow'r myself to offer;
O write my name within Thy book,
Inscribed upon Thy hand by Thee
I now am Thine eternally.

*Swedish: Med dig, min Frelser, vil jeg lide L 531:4-6 tr. DeGarmeaux;
tune: Wer weiß wie nahe mir mein Ende (ELH 483); alternate hymn: Beneath the cross of Jesus kneeling ELH 288*

168. Wednesday in Holy Week

While the king is at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance.

[Song of Solomon 1:12]

Matthew 26:1–16 Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, that He said to His disciples, “You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.” Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him. But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.” And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “To what purpose is this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor.” But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.” Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?” And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.

The high council in the palace of Caiaphas decided that Jesus must die, but not during the feast, for there were many Galileans in Jerusalem and a great multitude, so there might be an uproar. But in God’s high council it was decided from eternity that He should die just exactly at the Passover, and publicly before all the people. The Paschal Lamb shall be slaughtered at Passover among Jews and Greeks, because He shall save both Jews and Gentiles from death.

Now while the priests hold council with Caiaphas and say: “not during the feast,” Jesus is being anointed in Bethany. Offended at the waste of money, Judas goes out to get money again, and thus it is done at the feast. Let Satan lay his plans with devilish cunning and let the ungodly take counsel with thought and cleverness: “The Lord catches the wise in their own craftiness” [*Job 5:13*]. Even against their will they must all serve His purposes. How much more then will the faithful! This woman loved the Lord, for her no fragrant oil was too costly to be poured out upon Him. Her heart was full of the heavenly perfume of love. Money and goods she did not spare. Her desire was to come near to Jesus and serve Him and make Him glad. Then she did more than she was aware of: she anointed Him for His burial. She loved Him because He loved us with the love that caused Him to lay down His life for us. And the sacred anointing of her love did His heart good and comforted Him in the loss of unfortunate Judas. In the most

important event heaven and earth have seen, the suffering and death of God's Son, this woman has a significance so great that her deed is always recounted where the Gospel is preached. Why? It is love which does it, love which gladly offers what it has, and doesn't consider the cost when buying fragrant oil for Jesus. The council in the palace of Caiaphas and the company in Bethany seem mutually exclusive, but they also explain each other: the woman pours out the 300-denarii anointing for Jesus; Judas sells Him for 30 pieces of silver.

Greed is always poor and robs the heart of every noble feeling. Love always has an abundance and is able to fill the house with heavenly perfume.

Lord Jesus, give us love, the greatest and the most blessed gift to be given. Amen.

Jesus, Thy boundless love to me
No thought can reach, no tongue declare:
Unite my thankful heart with Thee
And reign without a rival there,
To Thee alone, dear Lord, I live;
Myself to Thee, dear Lord, I give.

O grant that nothing in my soul
May dwell but Thy pure love alone;
O may Thy love possess me whole,
My Joy, my Treasure, and my Crown:
All coldness from my heart remove;
My ev'ry act, word, thought, be love.

Gerhardt: L 304:1-2 ELH 372:1-2 tr. J. Wesley; tune: Surrey

169. Maundy Thursday – I

Lord, teach us to understand what You do. Amen.

John 13:1–15 Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean." So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."

There are no words of ours which can do justice to this grand text, or can bring out its wondrous beauty. Lord, explain it to us! — The righteous sinner is completely clean before God. All his sin is taken away. He is clothed with Christ's whole, seamless robe. "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." God has justified them, who will then accuse them [Rom 8:1,33]? Such a person is also born again and lives in righteousness and purity. He has a new heart which loves God and does His will. But he

also has flesh and blood, and therefore his conduct is still imperfect. There is still more or less dirt clinging to his feet. "You are clean," Jesus said to the disciples, but see how they sin with their pride! Each of them wants to be the greatest. So all believers have many faults, known and unknown. Therefore we continually need both forgiveness of sins and renewal. This is what the Lord shows by washing the disciples' feet. If He did not always give us new grace for the sins that still cling to us, then we could not continue in His fellowship. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). If you feel no need for daily forgiveness and continual sanctification, then you are not a child of God and cannot pray the Lord's Prayer from the heart, for there we pray: "Forgive us our trespasses." If you cannot pray for grace, then you do not have grace, either. Then you are outside the state of grace and have no part in Jesus. O how important it is always to know one's sin and to receive mercy! Only in this way can we continue in grace, only in this way can we advance in sanctification and day by day become purer in all our conduct.

But whoever is washed by the Lord and continually lets Him wash his feet can and shall also wash others' feet, that is: serve the brethren with heartfelt love, bear with their faults, cover their weaknesses and help them to improve. This is what the Lord would have us do. Let no one in His flock consider himself too good to bow before his brethren and wash their feet, however impure they are, and let no one look with indifference when his brother strays into filthy paths and defiles himself with sin! Do as the Lord did! He knew that He was the Almighty, and He washed the feet of His sinful disciples. The *greater* one is, the meeker he must be. *Only Jesus* can wash us, and yet we also should wash one another. Whoever understands this, let him do it! Here is the true joy of life.

If You know me, Lord, that I am washed and completely clean, then I only need to wash my feet! Let me not be found among the unfortunate whom You do not wash! Sanctify me, Lord, wash my feet, let no filth of sin cling to me. Sanctify me *completely and wholly* in spirit and soul and body. Give me meekness and love, so that I may cheerfully wash the feet of the brethren. Grant me to be like-minded to You, that I may do what You did. Amen.

Ye Christians, who yourselves do call
God's children, listen, one and all:
Live now in God the Father's will
And not as yet your flesh doth will,
Yea, wheresoever ye do live,
In Jesus' footsteps do now strive.

O think upon His gracious love
That did your sinful guilt remove;
He loved you even to His grave,
Himself to death He freely gave,
Unto His Father, savor sweet,
That your salvation did complete.

The Holy Spirit's fruits, now see,
That show themselves in goodness free,
In truth and righteousness they shine
To show that heaven shall be thine,
Receive the crown of glory bright
And enter heav'n's eternal light.

*Kingo: I Kristne, I, som kaldes vil Guds Børn L 286:1.2.6 tr. DeGarmeaux; tune: Melita (ELH 418);
alternate hymn: How can I thank You, Lord ELH 423*

170. Maundy Thursday – II

Lord, wash us and clothe us and make us worthy guests at Your Table. Amen.

1 Corinthians 11:23–29 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.

Among the things the Lord shared with Paul by revelation was also the instruction about the Holy Supper. How important and significant this Sacrament is! It was instituted in the most solemn night of the Lord’s life on earth, and after His ascension He instructed Paul about it, when He calls him to be an Apostle. All the same words He used at the institution, He repeats to Paul. Exactly what the other Apostles shared from that night, Paul shared from his meeting with the Lord. Let us understand that the Holy Supper is of more importance for our Christian life than words can express, and let us regard it and use it thus!

It was this Thursday evening that He sat with His disciples in the room in Jerusalem. He had already offered Himself and was already anointed as One who had already died for our sins. Yet before His death, on this night when He ate the Passover with them, He wanted to institute the Sacrament which gives us His body and blood to eat and drink and which transports us to the time and place of His sacrificial death. In the hour of His death it must be done, that we may not only receive His body and blood, which He sacrificed for us, but may also sit at the altar on which the sacrifice was made, and proclaim the Lord’s death. “Then He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, saying: Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you. In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, *This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.*” The *Passover Lamb* was a striking picture of Jesus. Here there must be more than a picture and sign, and the Lord’s words expressly say: *This is My body.* With divine power He gives the disciples His glorified and heavenly body, while He still sits there in the form of a Servant. And with His almighty Word He commands that the bread and wine of the Sacrament shall always communicate to us this His body and blood.

As surely as Jesus Christ is truthful and almighty, so certainly “the Sacrament of the Altar is the true body and true blood of Jesus Christ under the bread and wine.”¹ Yet just as the bread does not merely *symbolize* Christ’s body, neither does it cease to be bread and instead *become* the Lord’s body. No, when you eat the bread of the Supper, *the Lord gives You His body in the consecrated bread.* He makes no mention of the bread. Just as when you give a sick person healing and strengthening drops, you call it medicine and not water, even though you give it to him in water. Because Christ’s body and blood are *united* with the bread and wine in the Supper, Paul says: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” What a precious thing this Sacrament is! It also stands immovable until the end of time, and the Christians who use it proclaim thereby that Christ, God’s Son, died and lives and shall come again in glory.

Believers nowadays go to the Lord’s Table all too seldom. The ancient Christians used the Supper much more often. Don’t we really need to be strengthened in faith, to be refreshed in love, to be

¹ Luther’s *Small Catechism*: Explanation of the Sacrament of the Altar.

confirmed in hope, to come near to Jesus, to taste His heavenly sweetness, to remember powerfully His death, to be led deeper into the fellowship of His sufferings, to be joined more closely with one another in holy brotherly love, to be inflamed with the zeal to witness, in short, that Christ take shape in us? O how we need this! Then, dear brethren in the Lord, go to the Altar more often than you have before. Jesus is closer to us there than anywhere else here below. There He meets you. There He gives Himself to you. There you are with Him in that night of suffering and death. There you enter the fire of love and it enters you, for “whoever eats My flesh,” He Himself said: “and drinks My blood remains in me and I in him.” Blessed Meal, where I may receive my Lord Jesus! Heavenly feast of joy on earth! I will seek you often.

Now, since the Supper is the Lord’s body and blood by the power of the Lord’s Word, so that *all*, both believers and unbelievers who eat and drink there, in truth eat and drink Jesus’ holy body and blood, it is therefore so extremely important to examine oneself. The Spirit of God testifies that you will be guilty of the Lord’s body and blood if you eat it unworthily! You assault the Lord Himself. You betray Him, you give Him the kiss of Judas, you crucify Him and blaspheme Him, — you eat and drink to your judgment! For God’s sake examine yourself. He shall give you enlightenment for this. But if you recognize yourself as truly unworthy and desire from the heart to be cleansed from sin, and believe that the gifts of the Supper are Jesus’ body and blood, then you are prepared. Don’t stay away, as do many who despise the Lord’s command, when He says: “Do this in remembrance of Me!”

God, help us to eat Your Supper often and rightly and to be strengthened in faith, assured of grace, and to come to the eternal inward communion with You and all the saints. Keep us from using the Supper to our judgment. Forgive us all our sins against the Supper. Let Your Spirit, as often as we come, help us across time and space to sit with You among the Twelve in the upper room in Jerusalem that Maundy Thursday night, and there forget all else and taste only Your love. Amen.

My heart to You I gladly bring,
So sorely wounded by my sin,
And healing find in that great tide
That flows from out Your wounded side.

Today I am my Savior’s guest;
My soul, consider this great feast;
He bids you now to sit at meat
With Him—and of Himself to eat.

Here tenders He in form of bread
His body, which for you did bleed;
And in the wine His royal blood,
Of grace, a precious purple flood.

Eat, drink, and in your heart be glad
For such food angels never had;
And for the cup your Lord now thank,
Which heaven’s angels never drank.

I trust and know what I obtain
Is far above my mind’s domain.
My Jesus here entire and whole
Is food and drink for my poor soul.

Look earthward, angels, now with me
And honor this great mystery,
That Jesus, set at God’s right hand,
Is here in bond of testament.

In heav'nly gladness dwells our Head,
Yet is He here in this blest bread.
There dwells He in his power divine,
Yet gives Himself in this blest wine.

How this can be I do not know;
He has not willed the way to show;
Such streams my reason ought not ford;
I only need to trust His Word.

Kingo: O Jesus, at Your altar now L 67:2-9 ELH 324:2-9 © Juul B. Madson. Used by permission.; tune: Herrnhut

171. Good Friday – I

O Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy upon us.

John 19:30. Luke 23:46 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. ... And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, “Father, ‘into Your hands I commend My spirit.’” And having said this, He breathed His last.

All that is predicted of the Messiah’s work and suffering in His state of humiliation is now finished. All that the Law demands of us Jesus has now fulfilled. He has fulfilled it perfectly for us all.

“*It is finished,*” this truth is what I need more than anything else in the world. “*Because He has done this*” — as it says finally in Psalm 22 — the kingdom is His, and there is salvation for Jews and Gentiles, for high and low, from the first sinner on earth to the last, for all, all from one end of the world to the other (Psalm 22:28-31). All is finished for me and for all. The Law condemns me because I have not kept it. But Christ makes me free, because He has kept it for me and suffered what I deserved, released me, and purchased me. The kingdom is His, and I am His. The work of Christ embraces every work necessary for our justification. All is finished, so there is no more room for any of our works to attain righteousness. He *has done* this, so in His kingdom there is no question about the merit of our works for salvation or the power of the Law to save and to condemn. For what He has done is truly done, and is not still to be done. Therefore it says: “Come, for all things are now ready” [Luk 14:17]! This I will shout — O that it may be heard over all the earth! This I will confess, as long as I live, and when my time comes, I will leave, bow my head in death, and commend my soul to God with the words: “*It is finished.*”

The Lord *began* His words on the cross with *prayer to the Father*, and *He ended with prayer to the Father*. What He said between the first and last words, we have heard. What He endured, none of us can say or imagine. But it was all for us. Because He did this for *me* and has baptized me into His death, He is with me and in me. And therefore through all my suffering and in my last hour I can say: “Heavenly Father, hear my prayer, and save me!” So Stephen in death could pray: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” [Act 7:59], and Luther: “Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth” (Psalm 31:5). Yes, everyone who believes in Jesus, enters into communion of life with Him, the Lord victorious over death, shall go with Him from earth into paradise.

Live and suffer each day with faith in these victorious words of Jesus: “*It is finished,*” “*Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit,*” and you are freed from the law and dead to sin, and in your dying hour the faithful Holy Spirit shall whisper these words into your soul. Then you *cannot* be lost, but as surely as God lives, enter into eternal salvation.

“May my soul be calm and fearless As I lie expecting death; May Thy love so great and peerless Lauded be, with my last breath. When at last I fall asleep, Dearest Jesus, may I keep Firm the faith that life and heaven By Thy death to me were given.”² Amen.

² This paragraph is adapted from Peer Strømme’s translation.

O sweetest Lord Immanuel,
Thou spared my soul from ceaseless hell;
Thy death, Thy pain, Thy bloody sweat
Have saved me from eternal death;
Thy capture and those cruel bands
Have freed me from the devil's hands.

*Let me consider, my life long,
Thy death, and give Thee thanks in song!
Thy merit let my comfort be
Since Thou hast saved me graciously
From Satan, sin, and hellish fire
Unto the joy of heaven's choir!*

And when my final hour shall come,
My soul to heav'n Thou callest home;
Lord Jesus Christ, with me abide;
Protect me from the devil's pride,
Lest he with all his pow'r and might
May e'er deprive me of Thy light.

I am Thy true possession, Lord,
For Thou hast bought me by Thy blood,
Though I had wandered oft so far
Thou sought me ever to restore;
I die, Lord, if Thou leavest me,
My only comfort is in Thee.

Into Thy hands I do commend
My soul and body to the end;
Regard me as Thine own, dear Lord,
And spare me from the hellish horde!
By Thy red blood I now am cleansed;
Receive me to Thy gracious breast!

*Delivered from this vale of tears
I enter paradise with cheers;
With blesséd choir my soul shall sing
Honor and joy through heav'n shall ring;
There face to face my God I see,
His grateful child eternally.*

*Kingo: O Hjertekjære Jesus Krist L 337:3.6-8 tr. DeGarmeaux; tune: Vater unser (ELH 383);
alternate hymn: The Lord into His Father's hands ELH 339*

172. Good Friday – II

*Lord Jesus, let our faith in Your blood be firmly grounded
in the truth of Scripture. Amen.*

John 19:31–37 Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, “Not one of His bones shall be broken.” And again another Scripture says, “They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”

As conquering Lord over death Jesus gives His spirit into the Father's hands and His body to the grave. Yet He feels the rending pains in the moment of death, for that too was part of the wages of sin [Rom 6:23], but then the suffering is over, and now "He bows His head." Life has left His holy body. The soul has gone to paradise. How now do the angel hosts meet Him? But what do death and hell say now? Won't they finally admit defeat? Indeed it is over, the victory is the Lord's and — ours forever!

Our Passover Lamb is sacrificed, but now the soldiers come to break the legs of the two thieves. Won't they also break His? The Scripture forbids it (Exodus 12:46). His body shall not be maimed; they may not harm it. But by doing this they shall fulfill yet another Scripture passage (Zechariah 12:10), — so the whole Bible is joined together in Christ — and they shall pierce His side, so that the fount of life for our souls flows out of His heart. The Lamb had to be sacrificed for us, but we shall also be able at all times to sprinkle His blood on our hearts against the angel of death. "Immediately blood and water came out," John says, and in his Epistle he writes: "This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood... For there are three who bear witness ... the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one" (1 John 5:6-8).

"Just as a rib was taken from the side of sleeping Adam and made into a woman, whom he describes thus: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'; in the same way Christ the heavenly Adam fell asleep on the cross and from His side blood and water flowed out, the sacraments of the new covenant, by which He builds up His Bride, the Church, and the Apostle says of this: We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones" (Augustine³).

Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins. "He died for our sins according to the Scriptures," it is as sure as God is truthful. How certain John is about it, and Paul and all the Apostles! But just as certain is the testimony of the Apostles and the whole Scripture, that we who are baptized into Him have received a share in the blood and the water which flowed from His side in death. Our faith has such a sure foundation, and so solidly we can hope for eternal life through the death of God's Son. But whoever does not believe, and whose heart does not receive it, makes God a liar in the highest revelation of His love and treads the blood of God's Son under foot. God preserve us from this!

I thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your death, for the blood and the water from Your side, for the full and certain atonement, and for the holy Means of Grace, through which You make me a partaker in Your salvation. You know I fervently long for You. You know I pray to You heartily for a place among the poor sinners who stand beneath Your cross and are cleansed by Your holy blood. You know how precious these fountains of life are for my soul. You know how happy I am to live in Your Church on earth, and to be nourished there. But O Lord Jesus, sin and unbelief are still so strong in me! O precious, faithful Savior, increase my faith, and let me die daily with You and live in You. Lord Jesus, be my life. Sanctify me, and wash me, and kindle the fire of Your love in my poor soul. O how blessed I would be if I could from the heart live for You! Grant me grace, O grant all of us grace, kindest, sweetest Savior. Amen.

Be Thou my consolation,
My Shield when I must die;
Remind me of Thy Passion
When my last hour draws nigh.
Mine eyes shall then behold Thee,
Upon Thy cross shall dwell,
My heart by faith enfold Thee.
Who dieth thus dies well!

³ *Tractate 120:2 on the Gospel of John*. Laache seems to be paraphrasing Augustine. Here is the translation from the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Volume VII, p. 434-435): "Because of this, the first woman was formed from the side of the man when asleep, and was called Life, and the mother of all living. Truly it pointed to a great good, prior to the great evil of the transgression (in the guise of one thus lying asleep). This second Adam bowed His head and fell asleep on the cross, that a spouse might be formed for Him from that which flowed from the sleeper's side."

And when I am departing,
O part not Thou from me;
When mortal pangs are darting,
Come, Lord, and set me free:
And when my heart must languish
Amidst the final throes,
Release me from mine anguish,
By Thine own pain and woe.

*Clairvaux/Gerhardt: O Sacred Head L 334:4-5 ELH 334-335:8-9 tr. Composite;
tune: Herzlich tut mich verlangen*

173. Holy Saturday

*Lord Jesus, let it become clear to our faith
that You have made the grave a peaceful resting place. Amen.*

Matthew 27:57–66 Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb. On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, “Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So the last deception will be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.” So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

None of Jesus’ disciples had the courage or strength to bury Him. Who should do it then? Should His body be thrown in the valley of Hinnom to be torn apart by dogs? The very question grieves and saddens us. Rest assured: it is written in the Prophets that He shall be handed over to a rich man in His death, and an ungodly guard shall be set at His grave (Isaiah 53). The Father in heaven had a rich man of the high council dig a stone grave for himself in his garden near Golgotha, and now He puts it into this man’s heart to ask for Jesus’ body and to bury it there. But the high priests will fulfill the prophecy of the guard and thus in more ways than one — against their will — confirm our faith in the Lord’s resurrection. For not only does the setting of the guard confirm the truth of the Scriptures, but the whole event of the watch with the soldiers’ fleeing and lying shows us most clearly that the Lord is risen and the tomb is empty.

“Set the guard and seal the stone! — Earth shall quake and your seal be broken and your stone shall be rolled away. The situation has changed and the power is no longer yours. All you could do was deliver Him to the governor to be crucified. Now, since Jesus’ soul rests in paradise and has conquered death, now, since all the saints in heaven already prepare for Easter joy, now your power is ended, even over Jesus’ body. Just seal it and you shall see Him no more! Just go, and live well if you can! Soon you shall hear more, and the victory chariot of the Crucified shall roll past you. You have rejected the precious Stone, but He has become the chief Cornerstone [*Psa 118:22*]. He will crush you, or you will be offended at Him if you do not soon wake up and repent.

“Gentle Jesus, conquering Hero, Your body lies in the grave from Friday to Sunday! Who knows why You rested so long, why you did not rise up earlier? Who knows what took place in paradise? Blessed mystery, which Your Spirit will explain to us there. It is certain that You did not shy away from the condition in which the blessed dead now are, and which we in a short time shall enter. For You were out of the body, just as other souls are, and Your body rested as an abandoned temple of God, alone and

lifeless in the grave! If You became like us, then we too shall become like You, and no fear shall keep us from going the way You went, for You sanctified it and took away from it all danger and terror!” (Löhe⁴)

For the unbelievers death and the grave are frightening. They are forced to tell themselves that the dark, cold hole is the final end of their journey, comfort and reward for their work and struggle, the incredibly sad answer of hopelessness in all the aspiration and seeking of their longing. O they are forced to go further, and to tell themselves that beyond the grave there is something still darker awaiting them, because they serve sin.

But rejoice, believers, *your* grave is *Jesus’* grave, and His is yours! For wasn’t it for *our* sin He died? *Our* death He died, *our* grave He lay in, and what is then our burial other than our body’s rest in Jesus’ grave?

God, grant us grace to believe! The grave still seems so dark to me. I am tired and want to rest, but I would rather have another bed. Yet, where could I find a better one than that in which You rested, who are the Resurrection and the Life? Praise to You, Lord Jesus, for Your burial, praise for everything! Amen.

Ye believers, O how wondrous
Is our Jesus’ precious death!
O how mighty and how vig’rous
When for us He gave His breath.
Full redemption is the gain
Through our Jesus’ blood and pain!
’Tis indeed a heav’nly treasure
Which surpasses ev’ry measure.

Now my grave’s a place for sleeping
That I gladly may embrace;
Thus no more shall I be weeping
When they lay Thee in Thy place.
For indeed Thou shalt awake
Since death’s portal Thou didst break
And destroyed the grave’s dark hour
By divine almighty power.

*Hansen: Ak, hvorledes? Skal jeg skue? L 338:7-8 tr. DeGarmeaux; tune: Freu dich sehr (ELH 256);
alternate hymn: So rest, my Rest ELH 338*



⁴ Johann Konrad Wilhelm Löhe (1808-72) was a German Lutheran pastor who fought against Rationalism. In 1844 he published an influential *Agenda* for use in North America, based on older German Lutheran liturgies. He supported the establishment of a theological school at Fort Wayne, IN, in 1846, and the Neuendettelsau Mission Society in 1849. Also at Neuendettelsau he founded a Deaconess Home, hospitals, and a seminary which trained pastors for North America, Australia, New Guinea, and Brazil.

Easter

*Alleluia! Christ, our Passover is sacrificed for us.
Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia!*

Easter is the oldest and the most important festival of the Church, and for 2000 years the life of the Church has centered on it. Just as the Resurrection of Our Lord is the center of our faith, so it is high point of the Church Year. We prepare for it during Lent, and now we set aside six more weeks especially to meditate on its meaning to the Christian life. During this time we are reminded that through faith, Jesus' death and resurrection are our death and resurrection. In Him we have died to sin and risen to new life, thus Baptism is a recurring theme during the Easter season, along with the joy and the fruits of the Christian life.

Prayer for the Easter Season

We give thanks to You, O Lord Jesus Christ, exalted Prince of Life, that You gave Yourself for us into death, out of divine love, and offered Yourself to Your heavenly Father as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, thus delivering us from the power of death, the devil, and eternal damnation. In proof of this You, the Prince of Life and the Lord over death, rose from the dead on the third day, and brought forth righteousness, innocence, and eternal life. We pray You, grant us grace, that, by the working of Your Holy Spirit in us, we may take deep-felt joy and comfort in Your death and resurrection, thereby quiet our conscience and overcome all fear of death. And let Your resurrection be to us a cause and incentive to good works and fruits of righteousness, that we, as Your people, may be willing to worship You in the beauty of holiness. Grant that we may daily die to sin, crucify and slay the old Adam with his lusts and desires; that, on the other hand, we may arise spiritually, begin to live in righteousness, walk in a new life, purge out the old leaven, and become a new leaven. Grant furthermore, we beseech You, that we may look forward with comfort and joy to the resurrection of our deceased bodies, which on the last day shall come forth again by virtue of Your resurrection, and may we then with body and soul enter Your kingdom of heavenly glory and grandeur. Amen.

