

2012_04_01 (Maundy Thursday) Sermon – Ascension Batavia

GOD'S VICTORY OVER DEATH

Maundy Thursday: A Table Prepared in the Presence of Our Enemies

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

Psalm 23:4–6 (NKJV)

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. **5** You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. **6** Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.

OUR LORD PREPARES A TABLE IN THE PRESENCE OF ENEMIES

In Jesus name, whose blood shed cleanses us from all sin, dear Christians,

Jesus is your host this evening. From Mark 14, we read, **And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.** This is something only the host would do. For instance, you would not go into someone else's house, sit down, and say, "dinner is served" or "let us pray." Jesus is your host who prepares, blesses, and serves us this evening.

May the Spirit bless our meditation this Maundy Thursday as we consider the table prepared by our Lord in the presence of our enemies.

The terminology in our text is meant to paint a picture in our minds. The 23 Psalm pictures the Lord as our shepherd and we as His sheep. He provides all we ever need. He leads us beside still waters to drink. He protects us from harm.

As we read in v.5, His protection is so sure and His victory so complete He before His enemies. He prepares a feast. This is again the picture which David, the psalmist, paints for us. This is a precursor to the celebration we will enjoy this Sunday at the feast of our Lord's Resurrection victory.

Let the picture develop in your minds. He prepares a table. He anoints your head with oil. Your cup is overflowing. The terminology in verse 5 actually is closely related to that of Isaiah 25 which will form the basis for our sermon on Sunday. The words picture for us a banquet. But not just any banquet. The banquet table is prepared right in the enemies camp.

You walk beneath the shadow of death. The enemies are closing in. They surround you on every side. And what does the LORD do? He prepares a table for feasting. He

anoints your head – a picture of festivity and joy. In the days of King David, this anointing would be done at special festivals and banquets – celebrations. Such an anointing would mark you as a chosen guest of honor. It was a reception reserved for only the highest seats at the banquet. Your cup shows no lacking. The portion you receive is overflowing.

How beautifully now this picture relates to our consideration this Maundy Thursday. For what could better describe the business of our Lord on this the night of His betrayal. He prepared a table before us in the presence of His enemies. That is to say, He lays out and arranges this meal. He sets out the bread and the wine. Even though His enemies lie on His doorstep. Yes, in fact, Judas himself reclines at the table plotting to turn Jesus over to His enemies. We read, **“Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me.”** (Mark 14:18) This was one of His own disciples. As Mark also notes so pointedly, this was “one of the twelve.” The same man who dipped bread with Jesus, who walked with Him and learned at His feet, would betray Him with a kiss.

Jesus truly walked through the valley of the shadow of death. Who stayed awake as He prayed to His Father that this cup be taken from Him? When the Roman cohort came in darkness with swords and clubs, we read that they all fled. Who among us could claim that we would do any different?

Jesus alone was left to bear the sins of the world. And the enemies He was surrounded with was not just the Roman guard. It was not just the Jewish leaders and the high priest, Caiaphas. Jesus was surrounded by death. He alone was left, forsaken even by God. **Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”** It was Jesus who walked through the thickest darkness in the darkest valley when He faced death and hell for you.

This evening Psalm 23 can take on special meaning for us. Because this work of God in Christ is the very reason why we fear no evil. Because God has secured victory, there is nothing left that can touch us – not our sins, not sickness, and not even death. Though every enemy this world can muster would surround us, they have no power over us. His rod and His staff, they comfort you. Perhaps this rod and staff are pictured well by His Word and Sacrament. After all, it is these means of grace by which, as one commentator puts it, “God supplies His believers with fortitude and stamina for the worst perils of their heavenward way” (Stoeckhardt).

Our Lord prepares a table before us, to assure us that He is with us, that He protects us and that we have the victory over our enemies. Mark 14 – **22 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” 23 Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 And He said to them, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.**

How could God show more clearly that He is present among us? He gives us His own body crucified for you and His own blood shed for the forgiveness of your sins. This is the sure seal that you need fear no evil. Here is His servitude. This is the same service as our Lord displayed when He washed His disciples feet that same evening. He is with you.

And what is that valley that you must walk through? What dark shadows loom over you? What enemies creep in around you? The world and Satan press hard against the Church as it tries to tear away the good and perfect Word of God from us. They are luring us toward earthly thoughts and ambitions. They are ever ready to expose our weaknesses.

But Our Lord prepares a table before us.

Still the curse of sin lays on you sickness, the prospect of death for you or a loved one. You face the unnatural decay of this earthly body you've been given. And what of the wickedness in this world? We see evils all around. We see the killing unborn babies, or ruthless murders innocent children. We see war and hunger, persecution and suffering. We see loved ones snatched from us by sickness or tragic death. As one writer states, "The last dark valley for the believer to cross is the valley of death which is the last evil to be expected." (Stoeckhardt). Death is a sad prospect. It made Jesus Himself weep. How unnatural it all is.

Yet, perhaps one of the greatest shadows that looms over us is our own sinfulness. We carry a load of Peter-guilt. That is, we too have denied our Lord. Even when the Lord has sent us our own rooster warning, we ignore it. We have been our own enemy. We have served our own flesh. We've been angry or indulgent or just plain grumpy. We've despised God's Word, thinking it is just not enough for what I need. In our thoughts and actions we say, "I do not know the man." We would rather fit in with the crowd of sinners than stand up for our Lord.

But ... our Lord prepares a table before us. It is as if your victorious Lord laughs in the face of your enemies. He will not let your sins win you over. He prepares a feast of His forgiveness right in front of these your enemies. Your cup of salvation overflows with God's promises of forgiveness and eternal life.

(v.6) The word "mercy" might be better translated "steadfast love." It is often tied to God's covenant promises. This words emphasize that God's promises are sure and certain. God's steadfast love was what kept Him from abandoning you in your sins. It is what defends and protects you. It is what sent Jesus to the cross. Surely goodness and God's steadfast love will follow you all your days. God's love never leaves you. It is wiping clean your past step by step and setting you on paths of righteousness into the future. As Jesus says, "Do this in memory of Me."

What is it to dwell in the house of the LORD? Is it to be here in this building tonight? Or is it more? The house of the LORD is nothing more than the place or means by which

God makes Himself known to His people. To dwell in God's house is to enjoy a relationship and fellowship with Jesus. Indeed, the Lord's Supper is a Table of fellowship. The Word is God's dwelling place with you through faith. He comes to make His home in your heart. Through the bread and wine, God meets with us. He dwells with us. (**v.6b**)

Jesus told His disciples to go into the city and find a man carrying water. This man, He says, will show them an upper room, "furnished and prepared." God has promised just that – a Table furnished and prepared. He has set in order all you need. He gives you His body and His blood for you. He shows your enemies that they have no power here. ... here where He dwells ... here where His word is preached and salvation is given. In such simple means, we have such glorious blessings.

Yes, Jesus is our host this evening. Amen.