

“The Suffering Servant”

Jesus has been preparing His disciples for this – patiently teaching them who He is, and what the Father has given Him to do. The time is drawing near. He says to them – “You know that after two days is the Feast of the Passover, and the Son of Man will be given over to be crucified.”

It’s Passover time. Time for the lamb to be sacrificed. And Jesus is that Lamb of God – the Son of Man who will be given over to be crucified. But sacrificed, crucified, FOR WHOM?

Surely not for the chief priests and the scribes, the elders, or Caiaphas! On the surface they seem like moral, religious, spiritual people – but there are also things that most people don’t see.

Behind the scenes, in secret meetings, they plot to get rid of this Jesus fellow once and for all. They scheme to put an innocent man to death – and to do it in such a way that the people will praise them for being great defenders of the faith. Surely the Son of Man will not be sacrificed for such devious sinners.

Then there’s Judas Iscariot. He’s one of Jesus’ Twelve disciples – but he too has been secretly meeting with the chief priests and the captains of the guard. He has a new master that he follows now. Satan has entered into him and taken charge – using him as his instrument to attack and destroy Jesus.

And all of this for a mere thirty pieces of silver. Jesus doesn’t appear to be worth much in the eyes of the religious authorities – or Judas. Surely Jesus will not waste His holy precious blood for a traitor like Judas.

And if that’s not enough – all the rest of Jesus’ disciples are bickering and fighting about “who is the greatest?” They belittle, denigrate, and despise one another on their way to the top. Clearly, Jesus is not going to give up His life for such selfish, self-absorbed sinners.

And what about you? Are you sitting on your lofty perch looking down on “those people, those sinners” and feeling pretty good about yourself? God says that you are no different than them – that you’re just as much a sinner as Caiaphas, the chief priests, Judas Iscariot, and the rest of the disciples.

When you hear about their wickedness – you are listening to your plotting, your betrayal, your bickering – your attempts to get Jesus out of the way of your sinful desires. Like them, you are curved in on yourself – only concerned about “what’s in it for me?”

Jesus has every right to exclude you and your sin from His Passover sacrifice – right along with all the others. Why even enter into Jerusalem with their history of killing the prophets? Why suffer the blasphemous insults and mockery? Why go to the cross?

Because it’s time, the Father says. It’s time for the Son of Man to be given over to be crucified --- for sinners. The Holy One for the unholy. The worthy for the unworthy. So Jesus, the Lord, rolls up His sleeves – fills a bowl of water – and stoops down to do the menial and filthy task of washing the feet of His disciples.

He’s the Servant, the Suffering Servant – the One whom the Father sends to serve and to save..... sinners.

Peter objects, and so do you. That’s just so wrong! “Lord, you’re the last person in the world that should be doing such a thing.” “You shall never wash my feet!” Peter says. That’s a bold statement – excluding oneself from the Divine Service of the Lord – rejecting the Lord’s service to sinners.

“What I am doing you do not know now, but after these things you will understand,” Jesus says. After you have all scattered – after you have denied me – after you have locked yourselves away in fear --- I will come to you so that you may know what this is all about.

To say “you shall never wash my feet” is tantamount to saying – “Jesus, you shall never be handed over to be crucified for me.” Like Peter, we must learn that we are totally DEpendent on Jesus – that without His service we poor sinners cannot be saved.

“Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” That’s more like it. That’s the way that faith talks. “I need to be cleansed by you – I am sinful to the core – I sin in thought, word and deed. Wash me, the whole of me!”

“He who has been bathed does not need to wash more than his feet, for he is clean altogether.” Even though Jesus is the Servant, He doesn’t take orders from Peter – He’s still in charge. His bath is sufficient. It cleanses you altogether.

After all, He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That’s what Good Friday is all about. Jesus doesn’t leave any sinner, or any sin behind – when He is handed over to be crucified. With His holy, precious blood – and with His innocent suffering and death – He redeems all sinners – He redeems you, He purchases and wins you from all sin – He serves, and saves you, sinner though you be.

With Peter and the other disciples, we too follow and learn from our Lord Jesus. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – and He is still among you as One who serves. He serves you with His Sacrament – promising that it is “for you.”

Don’t be like Peter and say – “you can’t give me your most holy Body and Blood.” Don’t exclude yourself from His Divine Service – and don’t exclude your sin from His “for you” forgiveness. Only the sick need a physician. Only sinners need the Savior.

So eat the bread and drink the cup – for Jesus is giving you His Body and Blood that has atoned for the sin of the whole world. In this Supper, He is serving you – forgiving ALL your sin. Receive His service, for with it death passes over you. Eat and drink – for with His Body and Blood – you too pass-over from death to life. Amen.

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