**Luke 22:7-20 April 14, 2022 – Maundy Thursday**

**The Wounds that Heal**

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

 In Charles Dickens’ a Christmas Carol the Ghost of Christmas Present arrives happy, jolly, huge and full of life. The celebration is exciting, full of joy and the Christmas Spirit, the day is full of possibilities and exploration and excitement and just a room full of light, but by the end of that day, the Ghost of Christmas Present is weak, sick, dying, and small, and that joyous day moves to a dark, somber, and sad one as the Ghost of Christmas Future, the very image of death is next to come.

 This service, Maundy Thursday, is where we meditate upon the wondrous love of Jesus Christ at the calm before the storm. The last moments of fellowship with his beloved disciples in the upper room, but what awaits are the wounds that he knows will come. The wounds we have been hearing about and thinking about and talking about these past nights in the season of Lent. Wounds are painful, but wounds that you know you will have to experience that are planned and scheduled are the worst. Getting a shot brings pain, but a scheduled shot for a child is worse because all day they think about the pain that they are going to experience. We see the stress and anxiety that Jesus is going through in the Garden, of the pain he knows he will experience on our behalf and we can only imagine what it would be like for him to know he will suffer it all not for himself but for us. Not on account of his sin, but on account of our own. Tonight is the last few moments in the light, around the table, singing psalms and hymns, before it’s out into the darkness, it’s being arrested, mocked, spat upon, betrayed, abandoned…and ultimately crucified. Nailed to the cross, The Sacred Head of Jesus….wounded for our transgressions.

Look around at pictures of Jesus in our sanctuary and you won’t find many of him hanging crucified on a cross. The truth is, a crucifix makes us uncomfortable, and well it should. We squirm before it, it’s grotesque, bloody, far from PG to show Jesus in such a way as it really happened. It is simply painful to look upon our Lord as He suffers and to know the reason for His suffering. But we can’t ignore the blood in the season of Lent. Not when we sing such hymns as, “Glory Be to Jesus” “Alas and did my Savior Bleed.” “Not All the Blood of Beasts” and so many more that speak of suffering and of the shedding of blood. Especially our theme hymn for this series has talked about the wounds of Jesus, something that is at it’s core uncomfortable for us to talk about. “O Sacred Head now Wounded.” In the darkness of that first Good Friday, the totality of human sin—from the first sin of our first parents to the very last sin—all of it was gathered up and loaded on to Jesus. He bore the whole weight of it as if it was His own, including its penalty: death.

And so before you in this sanctuary hangs a cross. A beautiful golden cross, where Jesus is not found bloody and beaten and hanging. A cross that even glows and lights up in radiant white. But it’s still….a cross. An instrument of death, a means of killing someone in the most painful way possible. Look upon His cross. Tonight, look beyond the beauty of the golden cross and instead see Jesus on that cross. See His wounds, the nails fixing His hands and feet to the beams. See the blood continuing to run down His face from the cruel crown of thorns. And as you look, understand this: the wounded Man, dying in agony, is not suffering for a single wrong that He has done. His whole life was one of love. He was the only man who completely loved the Father with all His being, who perfectly loved His neighbor. And yet, it is because Jesus is love that He is now upon the tree of the cross. Love will not leave the sinner in his sin. Love takes that sin upon Himself. Love is wounded to grant us healing. Love is offering atonement for all the wrongs that we have done.

It is easier to just look at the beauty of a golden cross and be reminded of our conquering King Jesus Christ, to see him as He’s depicted in His resurrection rather than His crucifixion, but that would be to downplay His sacrifice for us. Yes, it is hard to look at a cross and see Jesus hanging there in pain, because it is hard to accept the truth that this is the penalty that our sins deserve. It is hard, and yet, it is good and it is right to look, to contemplate. It’s what these next few days are all about. We begin in the light, in the joy, in the light fellowship as we do in any other service, but by the end, when the altar is stripped and we leave in silence, and when we return to mark and mediate and contemplate the death of Jesus Christ tomorrow, we will better understand all that Jesus has done for us. It is good and right to pray that Christ would imprint this image on our hearts, so that we might carry it with us wherever we go, so that it can also be before our eyes in the moment of our death. You see, when the moment of death comes, Satan, who played down the importance of sin when he was luring you into temptation, will emphasize those sins in your memory in the hours of despair. When death is coming to you, he will replay in your mind the many sins you have forgotten. He will taunt you, saying that you are no Christian, that you are unfit for the Kingdom. He will tell you that you are his and that you have wanted to be his with every sin you have committed. And all the while, all those sins will be playing, in vivid detail, before your eyes, as you are struggling in your faith, near death, faced with your own mortality.

 Which is what brings us to the final wound, the last image, the wound that is different from the rest. The wound that Jesus inflicted upon himself to bring about our healing, the wound that points to the very meal that was instituted for our benefit. My dear friends, do not be deceived, you come forward tonight to receive the very body and blood of Jesus Christ. The body and blood that was sacrificed for you. You can’t ignore the language that is used to describe this Sacrament and that this is sacrificial language of atonement. The final wound is the very giving up of Christ’s body and blood to heal you of your sin through his very own body and blood given to you under bread and wine. When you look to the cross you can know that this sacrifice was made for you, and that while we receive this wondrous miracle in our mouths, it was his death and his wounds that brought forgiveness for us all.

So in that moment when Satan tempts you to believe that you are past redemption, remember your Baptism, remember your Confirmation and your reception of the very body and blood of Jesus Christ. And remember the love that Jesus has for you when you see the cross before your dying eyes. That is why it is vital to train yourself now to look upon the cross and see through the outward beauty, and instead when you see the cross to also behold your Savior’s wounds, to hold them close to your heart. In the hour of your death that will be your only weapon against the despair of the enemy. You will be able to look at all your sins as the accuser brings them before your eyes, and you will be able to acknowledge their hideous nature as testimony to your countless failures. But foremost in your sight will be another image: the image of the Crucified One. And it is this image that will shatter the devil’s attempts to draw you into despair. We sung these words, in our theme hymn, the final verse of “O Sacred Head Now Wounded” so that in those final moments we would remember the wounds of Christ, and where our true peace comes from. Hear the words of verse 7,

**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.**

The image you want before your eyes as they are closing in death is the image of the Son of God in His last agonies, where He answers for your every sin, pouring out His blood to blot out the accusations that Satan would use against you. Each sin, no matter how awful, has been covered over in the blood of the innocent Lamb of God, not just a Savior, your Savior. Not just the Jesus of the world, but your Jesus, your friend, your Messiah. In the Book of Revelation, St. John writes: *“And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the Word of their testimony.”* In that final hour, you will say with boldness: **“Lord Jesus, You are my righteousness. You have taken upon yourself the sin that is mine and have given to me the holiness which is yours. You have become sin to make me a saint.”**

 But that prayer can’t be true, unless Jesus dies for all of us, for the sins of the whole world, and the present day is ending. The time in the upper room is over. The happy words, the beautiful altar cloths and decorations, even the songs that we sing, must be set aside. Now it is time to go to dark Gethsemane, to go to Golgotha, to see the love that Jesus has for you by being inflicted with the wounds that brought about your healing.

To meditate upon this means that you will indeed be prepared for death: when the image of the Crucified One hangs before your eyes. His life is your righteousness; His death is your forgiveness; His wounds are your healing; His sufferings are your crown and glory. You are beloved of God. God in human flesh, Jesus Christ, has proved to be your dearest Friend, and He would make you His forever. Look upon His cross boldly and with confidence, and live.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.