

"Lent 2018 – The Battles of Lent"

The Battle of the Upper Room

Text: John 13:1-17

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours through the suffering and death Jesus Christ, who gave his life that we might live. Amen.

The text for this Ash Wednesday service is found recorded in the Gospel of John, the 13th Chapter, beginning with the First Verse:

ESV John 13:1-17 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

These are the verbally inspired words by which we will be filled and strengthened this evening. That all of the benefits of these holy words might be ours, so we pray, "**Sanctify us through Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!**" Amen.

Dear Fellow Benefactors of our Savior's great sacrifice, Lent should be treasured as the divine blessing that it is. It is the time we use to readjust our thinking on, and awareness of, sin and its terrible consequences in our hearts and lives. During Lent, therefore, we seek not so much the condemnation of sin in others; we struggle rather to

come to terms with sin in ourselves. That such a thing is necessary ought to be beyond debate among us. Yet this is not a goal that is easily reached or a war easily won. Tremendous honesty and humility are absolutely essential if we are to have any success at all. During Lent we therefore fall at the feet of our Savior and cry not only, "*God be merciful to me, the sinner!*" but add, "*And identify for me all that is displeasing to you in my life.*"

Yet isn't this the sort of thing that we, together with all Christians, do throughout the year, day in and day out? Don't we do this privately in our prayers each day, and publicly in our church services each week? Yes and no.

Over time, our perceptions shift. The change is usually so gradual that we fail to recognize it, especially any deterioration. Think of a shadow creeping slowly across the sidewalk in summer. We know, of course, that the shadow is moving, but the evidence is almost always cumulative. In other words, we tend to recognize change not moment by moment but after a certain period of time has passed – and then only if we have some point of comparison.

Sin is like that. We are aware that sin is having an effect on us and in us, but that effect is often so gradual and imperceptible that we need points of reference to understand what is happening to and in us. Lent is our point of reference as to time, and the Bible is our point of reference as to obedience. In other words, Lent is the time during which we seek to determine the extent of sin's invasion into our hearts. It is the special time we spend in the Word, asking our Lord to recondition and re-sensitize our hearts and lives – to bring our thoughts and actions into complete harmony with his Word and will. Since we live in the moral pigsty that is life in America, there can be no doubt that sin will have its effect. Our task, especially during this season of the Church Year, is to determine the extent of our own personal slide. May God the Holy Spirit equip us all with the wisdom, honesty, and humility necessary for such a task.

The theme for our Lenten meditations this year, as you have no doubt noticed, is *The Battles of Lent*. As always, our goal during the course of our midweek services is to view our Lord's Passion from a new and fresh perspective, and thereby to enhance and broaden our appreciation for what our Savior there accomplished for us. To that end, this year we intend to revisit some rather familiar places – places like the Upper Room, the High Priest's Palace, Pilate's Court, and Golgotha – and to see them as that which they actually were: battlefields. Our Savior defeated our great enemy, but not in a moment on Calvary's cross. He did so by waging a 33-year war, stretching from Bethlehem to Golgotha, from the manger to the cross. During our midweek services it is our goal to visit six of the final battlefields of that truly epic struggle, beginning this evening with *The Battle of the Upper Room*.

The first thing that we probably need to verify this evening, on the basis of God's Word, is that our forgiveness and salvation were not earned in a moment or by a single event, but through a prolonged struggle – a protracted war. This is necessary,

by the way, if we are to avoid minimizing what Jesus did for us by reducing it to the six-day struggle of Holy Week.

It startles some Christians to hear that Christ's death was not the sum total of what he had to do to secure our salvation. The fact is his had to be an *innocent* death, with the obvious implication that that death had to be *preceded by a perfect life*. That's why we describe Jesus' sin payment as consisting of "*his perfect life and innocent death*." The sacrifice that he brought to the cross was a lifetime of perfect obedience, having fulfilled every demand of his Father's law. That's why Jesus said what he did in John 6:3: "***For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.***" Again in Matthew 5:17 he said, "***Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.***" That fulfillment of the Law was what Jesus had to bring to the cross. That's also why God demanded perfect, unblemished sacrifices in the Old Testament – as a type or picture of the sinless Son of God that would follow. So also Peter in his First Epistle told us that only a sinless, truly righteous Jesus could pay for the sins of the unrighteous: "***For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.***"

Yet the mystery of the gospel is that an innocent man did not die on Calvary's cross. Having no sin of his own, God nonetheless made him guilty of all the sins ever committed by mankind. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "***For our sake he (God the Father) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***"

From this we learn that Christ's work of salvation was in fact a prolonged war that he fought on our behalf every single moment of every single day. Had he failed, even once, during those 33 years, all would have been lost. We therefore commemorate only a handful of those innumerable battles during this Lenten season as representative of a lifetime of desperate struggle. So we turn first this evening to the Battle of the Upper Room.

Some may think it odd to consider the Upper Room of Maundy Thursday and to see it as a battlefield. It seems such a calm and peaceful place. There our Lord was surrounded by his Apostles; there he instituted the Lord's Supper; there he gave us the "new commandment" to love each other. For there to be a battle, there must be an enemy. Judas, the betrayer, was there for a time, but there was also another far greater enemy, and unless and until we recognize who or what Jesus there fought against, you and I will be defenseless against that same adversary. Nor will it help us all that much to identify his adversary in general terms as "the devil," for the devil wears many disguises. The mask that Satan wore in the Upper Room, and therefore the particular enemy against which our Lord there struggled, was prideful self-love and self-service.

In Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus told his disciples, "***You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.*** ²⁶ ***It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,*** ²⁷ ***and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,*** ²⁸ ***even as the***

Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." The actions of Jesus in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday, as described in our text for this evening, provide a perfect object lesson as to just what he meant by selfless sacrifice and service. It's hard to imagine a more humble service than washing and drying someone else's feet.

Yet where was the threat to Jesus in any of this? You need only consider who Jesus was. He himself was the Creator-God. As true God, all things in heaven and on earth came into existence in an instant through the power of his Word alone. He himself was eternal, omniscient, and omnipotent. And he was perfectly willing to wash the feet of his rebellious creations. Think for moment of how easy it would have been to allow himself to lapse, even if but for an instant, into surly indignation over against such menial service. How easy it would have been (and from our perspective how *natural* and *understandable*) to consider himself and *his* rights and *his* deservedness. How simple to carry out such menial service, but with a bad attitude and complaint against "the unfairness of it all."

To recognize and appreciate the threat, consider your own failures. Contemplate the human wreckage of souls that could not even begin to resist such temptation when confronted by that same enemy. This despite the fact that we could not even make the claim that we deserve better than lives of humble service. That too is included in the list of things where we, even if we have fulfilled God's will perfectly, must simply acknowledge as no more than our "reasonable service." Not so with Jesus. He deserved only that which he is now again receiving: eternal praise, glory and honor as Very God of Very God. And yet with perfect selflessness and with a perfect attitude he dedicated his life to the perfect *service* of mankind. It was an entire lifetime of that perfect, humble service that he offered on the cross as the payment for our sin.

One last question I would ask you to consider this evening: *What do you naturally expect to hear next?* Don't you expect, having heard what selfless service Jesus has provided you, to hear how you must now go and do the same? Didn't Jesus say as much in our text when he said, "***For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.***" Yes and no. While he did there provide a perfect example of service for those who now want to thank him for what he has done, the Battle of the Upper Room was fought and won by him alone. His message was not, "*If you want to save yourself, do this.*" It was, "*If you want to thank me for winning this battle as your perfect substitute, this is what your life should look like.*"

Recognize therefore that Upper Room as the battlefield that it was, that Jesus alone fought there, and that he alone emerged undefeated. Amen.

Weekly Hymn and Sermon Schedule

February 14

Hymns: 140 (1-4)
367, 263

Lenten Theme:
"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of the
Upper Room"*

Text: John 13:1-17

February 21

Hymns: 388 (1-3, 6)
143 (1-5), 261

Lenten Theme:
"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of
Gethsemane"*

Text: Mark 14:32-42

February 28

Hymns: 358, 171 (1-5)
260 (1, 4 & 6)

Lenten Theme:
"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of the
High Priest's
Palace"*

Text: Mark 14:53-64

March 7

Hymns: 652, 371 (1-6)
258 (1, 3-5)

Lenten Theme:

"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of
Pilate's Court"*

Text: Mark 15:1-15

March 14

Hymns: 360, 155
463 (1-2, 8)

Lenten Theme:

"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of the
Streets of
Jerusalem"*

Text: Luke 23:26-31

March 21

Hymns: 153, 176
448 (1-2, 5)

Lenten Theme:

"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of
Golgotha"*

Text: Mark 15:22-32



St Paul Lutheran Church

Lent 2018

"The Battles of Lent"

- The Upper Room
- Gethsemane
- The High Priest's Palace
- Pilate's Court
- The Streets of Jerusalem
- Golgotha

-Please return this bulletin to the Entry Table for use next week-

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Michael Roehl – Pastor

Mid-Week Lenten Services - 2018

The Opening Hymn (As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)

Invocation

Pastor: *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

All: (Spoken) *Amen.*

Confession and Absolution (TLH 323)

Pastor: *Acknowledging that we stand in the presence of our Holy God we humble ourselves, and in true repentance, we confess our sins:*

All:

1. With broken heart and contrite sigh, a trembling sinner, Lord, I cry.
Thy pardoning grace is rich and free - O God, be merciful to me.
2. I smite upon my troubled breast, with deep and conscious guilt oppressed;
Christ and His cross my only plea – O God, be merciful to me.
3. Nor alms nor deeds that I have done can for a single sin atone.
To Calvary alone I flee – O God, be merciful to me.

Pastor: *Jesus Christ himself has been punished for your sins. God the Father has placed upon Jesus the iniquity of us all. According to His authority, and by His command, I announce to you the divine decree of our God that all of your sins are forgiven, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

All: And when, redeemed from sin and hell, with all the ransomed throng I dwell,
My blissful song shall ever be: God has been merciful to me.

The Reading of the Passion History

The Apostolic Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Pre Sermon Hymn (As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)

The Sermon – *The theme for our devotions this Lenten Season is*

"The Battles of Lent"

(Please turn to the back page for this evening's service details)

The Response – (Sung to the melody of Hymn 237)

1. *A mighty Fortress is our God, a trusty Shield and Weapon;
He helps us free from every need that hath us now o'ertaken.
The evil Foe means deadly woe;
Great guile and might his arms in fight;
On Earth is not his equal.*
2. *With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the Valiant One, Whom God Himself elected.
This Lord of Hosts is Jesus Christ;
Our Savior-King, our Mighty God.
He holds the field forever.*

The Prayer of the Day

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

P: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
And the love of God the Father,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

C: *Amen, Amen, Amen.* (Sung by all)

The Closing Hymn (As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)

Silent Prayer

Announcements

[All are invited to remain for fellowship and light refreshments.]