

John 18.1-11
The St. John Passion
Midweek Lenten Services
15 March 2017
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Iesu Iuva +

In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“O happy fault that merited for us such a Redeemer, and so great!”

So goes the ancient Easter Vigil *Exsultet*. The fault, of course, is the fall into sin. The great and glorious Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Mary's Son.

And it's with such eyes—with eyes focused *through the fall and onto Christ*—that we now see unfold before us the Passion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because this is the history that John tells—the history of the great and glorious Redeemer who in His mercy responds to our fault; who is the final, God-pronounced response to our fault. The Word made flesh. The Word made to suffer and die in our place. And what He does in His great Passion for us all is this: He threads the thread of the Fall into sin back through the needle. And He does it for you. And restores to you everlasting life. That's precisely the history that John tells.

For Christ, to begin His Passion, crosses the Brook Kidron—the brook called dark, black. That's what Kidron means in Hebrew. The Lord Jesus walks for us in and through the valley of the shadow of death. The death that Adam merited, and Eve, when they tasted the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The death that you and I, sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, must undergo. For we, like them, are sinners. Under the curse of death. But in His Passion, the Lord Jesus crosses the dark and black brook for you. And the Son of God, who cannot die, takes your death to Himself, that you might not die eternally.

And on the other side of the valley He comes to nothing other than a garden. For what began in a garden must also end in one. That's God's plan, first announced in Eden. What began in Eden must come to an end at Gethsemane. And just like the name Kidron is hardly incidental, neither is the name Gethsemane. Which means “fat, fertile, fruitful.” The Second Adam returns to a little Eden. That in another garden the Second Adam might unravel the curse brought on by the First in the primordial garden.

And it's here that the Lord Jesus gathered to Himself His disciples. That's why Judas knows where to find Him. “He'll be in the garden. Because that's where He always goes with His disciples.” And the disciples follow Him there, because they want to be with Jesus. They want to go with Him to witness and have a part in the unraveling of the curse. Just as today we gather together around Jesus in the garden of His holy Church, where through word, water, bread and wine He looses Satan's chains on us and our curse. Which makes the holy Church another Gethsemane where all the goods of Eden are returned. Where our own sin must yield and give way to Christ's righteousness through the forgiveness of sins. Where estrangement from God must, for the sake of Christ, become fellowship with God through His Word and Sacrament. And where death and eternal death must yield to Him who is the resurrection and the life.

And here in this new Gethsemane—here and only here in His holy Church—do you find protection and rescue from all the nastiness of the devil, the world, and death.

That’s exactly what the Passion of Jesus teaches. No? Judas shows up. Judas, whom the devil had already entered. Judas, whose body the devil now used in his raging against the Son of God. And with him the Roman cohort. And the henchmen of the high priests, the Temple police force. And they come, grim to behold. Their swinging lamps casting grim shadows as their light passes through the forest of swords and spears. Of swords and spears that can mean only one thing: death.

But Jesus steps forward. “Whom do you seek?” He asks. And they say, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

If we’d heard our name, we’d have picked the fattest disciple and taken cover. But not Jesus. Because God must be faithful to His Word. Christ must be faithful to His Word: “Of those whom You’ve given Me, I have lost none.” (John 6.39)

And so the One steps into the brink for the many. The Second Adam for the First. The Son of Mary, the promised Offspring of Eve, who as God cannot die, for the many offspring of Eve, who have merited nothing but death. And He says it: “I AM. I am He. I am the One you’re looking for.” And there in the garden, the cohort drawn together by Judas, whom the ancient foe had made his own, falls to the earth. To the earth where the serpent is consigned and decreed and cursed to creep. To the earth, from where he strikes the heel of Eve’s promised Son. And yet Jesus persists. And He says it again. “I AM. If you’re looking for Me, then let these go.” And He steps into the brink.

And He drinks the cup. The cup the Father has given Him. The cup He doesn’t want, but the cup assigned Him by the Father. The cup that Another must drink for Adam, who ate what he wanted. A cup that brings His own death, just as the fruit brought death for Adam and his descendants. But a cup that in the death of the Son of God brings life for Adam’s death.

And why does He do this? Certainly not for Himself, who knew no sin. But for you, who are a sinner. For you, who for your sins are death-and-grave-bound. For you, who for sin have deserved nothing but eternal separation from God.

But the Father will not have it this way. And so He re-threads the needle of the Fall on the back of His Son.

And He does it all for you, whom He so loved that He gave His only-begotten Son. Gave Him as the Only Sinner, that you might be counted righteous. And gave Him into death, that you might live. And to suffer bitter hell, that you might have the sweetness of eternal life. So that what the Second Adam brings is greater than what the First Adam ever had—a Redeemer from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil.

And so today in 2017 we speak from the heart and confess and believe it with whole church, with the whole church from Adam until now: “O happy fault that merited for us such a Redeemer, and so great!”

Gloria patri, etc. Amen.

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