

TAKE THIS CUP
Maundy Thursday Meditation
April 13, 2017
Text: Matthew 26:36-46

From the worship bulletin for Maundy Thursday:

***INVITATION TO THE TABLE**

(from the Book of Common Worship, c. 1993)

On this day, Christ gathered with His disciples in the upper room.

On this day, Jesus said: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

On this day, Christ our God gave us this holy feast, that we who eat this bread and drink this cup may here proclaim His holy sacrifice and be partakers of His resurrection, and at the last day may reign with Him in heaven.

And on this day, Christ the Lamb of God gave Himself into the hands of those who would slay Him.

***CALL TO WORSHIP**

(from Isaiah 53:4-6)

Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

BUT HE WAS PIERCED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, HE WAS CRUSHED FOR OUR INIQUITIES; THE PUNISHMENT THAT BROUGHT US PEACE WAS UPON HIM, AND BY HIS WOUNDS WE ARE HEALED.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way;

AND THE LORD HAS LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL.

As many of you know, the Garden of Gethsemane is on the Mount of Olives, a hill overlooking the old city of Jerusalem. Literally, the word "Gethsemene" means "an olive mill;" a gethsemene is a place where olives are pressed, crushed, put under unbearable pressure, to produce olive oil. I remind you of the line from the Call to Worship - "*He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities.*"

Jesus prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane that a particular "cup" be removed from Him. This isn't the first time Jesus spoke of this cup. A few days earlier, the mother of two of the disciples, James and John, had asked for a special honor to be bestowed on her sons when Jesus would come into His kingdom. When she asked her question, Jesus looked at her and her boys and replied, "*You really don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?*" With all the naïve confidence of their youthful years, James and John replied, "*We can!*" Jesus replied, probably with a bit of a foreshadowing sigh, "*You shall indeed drink from My cup.*" Now, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus chooses these same two disciples, James and John, along with Peter, to accompany Him. He had also brought these same disciples along to an earlier event we commemorated at the outset of the Lenten season, the Mount of Transfiguration. There they caught a glimpse of the glory to come; now Jesus brings them here ... perhaps to let them know that such glory comes at a dreadful, but necessary, cost.

Jesus tells them He is so overwhelmed, so full of foreboding and sorrow, that He was at the point of death. Three times Jesus prays that a "cup" be taken away from Him. Other Gospel accounts tell us He was in such great anguish that His sweat was like great drops of blood. What kind of cup is this?

In fifteen different Old Testament passages there are references to a particular cup, a terrible cup, a cup that contains the wine of God's wrath. Psalm 75:7 -- "*In the hand of the Lord is a cup, and the*

wine foams in it, hot with spices; he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs." All the prophets refer to this cup full of the fiery, foaming of God's wrath and fury, a cup that is reserved for the wicked to "drink;" a cup the sinful must drain to the dregs.

Now there isn't a person here, myself included, who doesn't deserve to drink at least a portion of the wine of God's wrath. Jesus Christ was the one man who had ever lived on this earth on Whom that cup had no claim. He was sinless. There was no need for Him to taste the cup reserved for the sinful. The prophet Jeremiah, though, foretold a time when the innocent would taste the wine of God's wrath. And here is Jesus, the only innocent One in all human history, and He is about to drink the cup ... for God's wrath is about to be poured out on Him.

There is a sense in which the crucifixion was the most obscene event in human history. On this night Jesus knows that He is about to become an obscenity. Think of it ... when He will be on the cross on Friday, by the inscrutable design of God's grace, the God who loved this world so much that He sent His only begotten Son, the sin of the world will be *imputed* to Him. The obscenity of the murderer, the liar, the adulterer, the abuser, the thief, the embezzler, the cheat ... all these sins and more that violate the people of this world and grieve a holy God will be at one point focused on one man. The Scriptures tell us He who is the incarnation of God is about to become the incarnation of sin ... the absolute paradigm of obscenity. In and of Himself, Christ was pure, sinless, perfect, holy, majestic. However, once He embraces our sin on the cross, all of the ugliness and all the dirt and stain of human corruption will be focused, concentrated on His person.

Nineteenth century pastor and author, George MacDonald, wrote this: *"It is with the holiest of fear that we should approach the terrible fact of the sufferings of our Lord. Let no one think that those were less because He was more. The more delicate the nature, the more alive to all that is lovely and true, lawful and right, the more it feels the antagonism of pain ... the more dreadful is that breach of the harmony of things whose sound is torture. He felt more than man could feel, because He had a larger feeling."* Let me repeat that last line: *"He felt more than man could feel, because He had a larger feeling."* Like a musician who is especially sensitive to tonal discord, the sinless and pure Jesus must have been *acutely* sensitive to the harsh discord and ugliness of human sin. He Who knew no sin was about to become the Cup into which the filth and the weight of the world's sins would be poured. And He **dreaded** it, He **felt** it; that is why we call these events the Passion. Three times He prays the cup may pass from Him. *"If there be any other way for salvation to be accomplished, let it be so. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."*

But there was no other way. On Good Friday, God laid on Him the iniquity of us all. There is a nice touch by John in his Gospel; John tells us the *very last act* of Jesus Christ on the cross was to receive a drink of sour wine, a drink of vinegar, a drink of *wine gone bad*. It was lifted to Jesus' lips, and when He had received the drink, it was then that Jesus said, *"It is finished."* The cup reserved for the wicked is now finished. It is drunk to the dregs by Christ.

On this night, just moments before going to Gethsemane to pray about that dread cup He faced, Jesus had met with His disciples in an upper room, and He offered to them there a new cup. "Take this cup from Me," He said. "Take and drink." The cup of the new covenant is now a cup of *blessing*. No longer is this the cup of God's wrath; this has become the cup of God's grace. No longer is it full of the wine of God's righteous judgement, but it is a cup full of the wine of Jesus blood, shed for the forgiveness of our sin. On this night the cup of wrath has been *transformed* into a cup of blessing, filled with the blessing of God, the blessing and hope for glory gained through the broken body and shed blood of Christ.

There is one final place in Scripture where the cup of God's wrath makes its appearance, in Revelation 14:10. Revelation 14 makes clear that those who don't serve and honor God will one day taste the cup of God's fury; they will drink the cup of God's wrath. So, the Bible intimates that every human being is going to drink a cup, sooner or later; as Jesus said to James and John earlier, *"You shall indeed drink!"* The question is, which cup will it be for you? The cup of God's fury, or the cup of God's grace? We do have a choice. For all who earnestly repent of their sin, to all who seek to follow Jesus as Lord, as Host of this Table He now says to each one of us, *"Take this cup."*

This cup that has been graciously transformed from the cup of wrath into the cup of blessing.