

4 April 2023
Holy Tuesday Meditation

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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Text: John 18:1-11

In the Name of (+) Jesus. Amen.

Last night, we meditated on Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and that His disciples *couldn't* - they couldn't watch and pray with Him. They fell asleep. Time after time after time. And Jesus told Peter, ***the spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.*** And we considered how our flesh is weak, too. Our spirits are willing, our spirits want to do what is right, we want to follow Jesus, and yet our flesh - our wretched flesh - is weak.

But tonight, as if spurred on by Jesus' words, and if wanting to prove Jesus wrong, Peter makes the opposite mistake. For tonight, we hear that Peter draws the sword to defend Jesus. Tonight, for Peter, ***the flesh indeed is willing, but his spirit is weak.*** That is, his faith, is weak.

And just as we considered last night, how true this often is of us as well. Instead of relying on faith, instead of relying on the Word of God, we take matters into our own hands. We try to do it ourselves. And when we do so - not when we do what has been given us to do, but when we think we can improve upon God's plan, His Word, or His ways, or that God needs us to defend Him and His kingdom, it is because our spirit, our faith, is weak.

Peter should have known better. He should have known better because he had just witnessed the power of God's Word over the weapons of men. For when ***a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons,*** all Jesus had to do was speak; all Jesus had to do was say the words ***I am he***, and all the might and weapons of men fall to the ground like so many tipped over dominoes. And there is no doubt who and what is strong here.

But then when Jesus allows these soldiers and officers to wield their power against Him, to arrest Him, Peter springs into action. He strikes. It's a wonder he wasn't struck down on the spot by the soldiers. But that he wasn't was also to fulfill the Word of God, that ***of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.*** But you kind of get the feeling that Peter was lost, or at least, greatly confused and dismayed. He was teetering. One moment his spirit is willing but his flesh is weak, the next his flesh is willing but his spirit is weak. He doesn't know what to do.

But while Peter may not know what to do, **Jesus does.** And so He says to Peter, ***put your***

sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?

He will drink this cup. It is His Father's will. It is His will, too. To save you. To do so, He will have to ascend the cross and suffer, and it won't be easy. He will not feel the cold steel of a sword, but the burning wrath of God against the sin of the world. He will be the sacrifice Isaac wasn't, the Passover Lamb greater than all others, whose blood will cleanse us from our sin and set us free. He will drink this cup. Your cup. Judas' cup. Peter's cup. The soldiers' and officers' cup. There will be not one cup of wrath He would not consume and bear. He will do it. In love for His Father and for you.

So while He tells Peter to ***put [his] sword into its sheath***, as one of the hymns we will sing on Easter puts it: *Where the paschal blood is poured* - the blood of Jesus' suffering and death - *Death's dread angel sheathes the sword* (LSB #633 v. 3). There is now no threat hovering over us to cut us off from God, from life, from our Saviour, *where the paschal blood is poured*.

Which was not just on the cross, but also now as we gather around the Body and Blood of Jesus in His Supper. For there the paschal blood is poured for us to drink for the forgiveness of our sins. And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation (Small Catechism).

So when you are like Peter, confused, dismayed, one moment your spirit willing but your flesh weak, and then the next your flesh willing but your spirit weak, when you don't know what to do, *do this*. Do what Jesus did. **Drink the cup your Father gives you.** Which for us is the cup of blessing. Don't wield the sword and believe in its strength; wield the Word and believe in its strength. Or better to say, His strength. *For when you are weak, then He is strong* (2 Corinthians 12:10).

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.