

THE PENITENT THIRSTS FOR THE LORD

Sermon for Maundy Thursday, 2017

Psalm 143

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon tonight is Psalm 143: **<sup>1</sup> O LORD, listen to my prayer! Open Your ears to my pleas for favour! Answer me in Your faithfulness and in Your righteousness!**

**<sup>2</sup> Do not bring Your servant into judgment! For in Your sight there is no one alive who is righteous.**

**<sup>3</sup> For the enemy has been pursuing my life. He has crushed my life to the ground. He has been making me live in dark places, like those who have died long ago.**

**<sup>4</sup> Therefore my spirit inside me has become faint. My heart inside me has been overcome with numbness.**

**<sup>5</sup> I remember the days of long ago. I have been meditating on all that You have done. I am meditating on what Your hands have done.**

**<sup>6</sup> I have been spreading out my hands to You. My soul is thirsting for You like a parched land.**

**<sup>7</sup> Answer me quickly, O LORD! My spirit has been wasting away. Do not hide Your face from me, or I shall be like those who are going down into the pit!**

**<sup>8</sup> Cause me to hear about Your mercy in the morning! For I trust in You. Cause me to know the way on which I should go! For I have been lifting up my soul to You.**

**<sup>9</sup> Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD! I have come to You to conceal myself away.**

**<sup>10</sup> Teach me to do what You desire! For You are my God. May Your good Spirit lead me on level ground!**

**<sup>11</sup> For Your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life! In Your righteousness, bring my soul out of trouble!**

**<sup>12</sup> In Your mercy You will silence my enemies, and destroy all who are hostile toward me! For I am Your servant.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Psalm 143 is the last of the seven traditional penitential psalms. The author of this Psalm is David. The Septuagint (the original Greek translation of the OT) attributes this psalm to the time when David's son Absalom sought to take his throne, forcing him to flee for his life. David's troubles with Absalom arose because of his own sin with Bathsheba (see 2 Sam 13:10-12) and his distress arises from awareness of what sin has done to separate him from God. David was running for his life into the barren desert wilderness (2 Samuel 15). Being pursued by his son Absalom, together with the army of Israelites who followed, David cries out to the Lord: "**<sup>1</sup> O LORD, listen to my prayer! Open Your ears to my pleas for favour! Answer me in Your faithfulness and in Your righteousness! <sup>2</sup> Do not bring Your servant into judgment! For in Your sight there is no one alive who is righteous... <sup>6</sup> I have been spreading out my hands to You. My soul is thirsting for You like a parched land.**"

David does not base his prayer on his own worthiness before God. Although relatively speaking, David is the *innocent party* in his conflict with Absalom, yet he recognises that his own sins make him unworthy of claiming any blessings from the LORD. He bases his appeal on the LORD's faithfulness to His promises of deliverance through the coming Christ. David asks to be judged, not on the basis of his record, but on

the basis of God's mercy. Because he is a child of God through faith, David can call upon the LORD for help.

We do not have to be pursued by an enemy into a desert wilderness to call out to God in desperation. The fallen-ness of our sinful condition confronts us day in and day out. In this condition, no one is righteous before God.<sup>1</sup> We all stand under God's judgment. We are sinful from birth, and we sin daily in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. Our souls are spiritually parched, dried up; without God and the sustenance He provides, we are, as the Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians, *dead in trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1).

King David felt great oppression from his enemies. In fact, David felt like one who is buried alive forever. “<sup>3</sup> **For the enemy has been pursuing my life. He has crushed my life to the ground. He has been making me live in dark places, like those who have died long ago.**” We, too, have an enemy pursuing us. Remember the Apostle Peter's words, reminding us to “*be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour*” (1 Peter 5:8). The devil particularly stalks those who have been claimed by God as His dear children. Like insurgents lying in wait to ambush the unsuspecting, so Satan and his legion of evil angels seek to attack the faithful with despair, doubt, and eventual unbelief. Furthermore, there are also those of the world who despise us because we are not of the world. Martin Luther notes, “*Here one should keep in mind that this psalm has been and is spoken in the name of the whole people of Christ and of each person individually. The daily enemies of this people are the worldly-wise and the self-righteous, who do not know and refuse to know anything about the grace of God,*” (AE 14:196). The devil and the

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 3:10

world crush us, seeking to make us feel like we are abandoned by God, **crushed to the ground, living in dark places.**

Furthermore, David, this valiant warrior, who killed a giant when he was but a youth, acknowledges his own weakness: “**4 Therefore my spirit inside me has become faint. My heart inside me has been overcome with numbness.**” Our spirit, too, often becomes faint and fails. The old Adam arises each day within us. We are weak and incapable of helping ourselves. We do not know where to go; we don’t know the best choices to make; we are like lost lambs in need of a Good Shepherd.

And so, as we face our sin and its consequences, as we face the enemies that assail us, the devil, the world, and our flesh, as we face our weakness, as we feel smothered and faint, all the life and energy being sapped out of us, it is then that the penitent cries out to God. Like David, we cry out for mercy – for the forgiveness of our sins. Like David, we stretch “**out (our) hands to (the LORD).** Our souls are **thirsting for (the LORD) like a parched land.**” We cry out to God for sustenance, for word of God’s steadfast love, for refuge and deliverance from the enemy, for guidance and teaching, for the leading of the Holy Spirit, for preservation of life - life in God.

We cry out, and like David, sometimes it seems like God doesn’t hear, or that God delays in answering us. Luther writes: “*God’s delay in granting grace and help causes the soul to fear that it is forsaken and condemned. But it is put on the rack to make it desire greater and more profound grace and thus receive more perfect grace. Now he is a truly Christ-formed man who is inwardly disconsolate and of a contrite spirit and has a constant longing for God’s grace and help,*” (AE 14:201).

As we read carefully through Psalm 143, we see that David is not simply crying out to the Lord because God can rescue him from his enemies at this particular desperate juncture in his life. Rather, he thirsts

for an ongoing relationship with God that will guide his whole life. He says, <sup>5</sup> **I remember the days of long ago. I have been meditating on all that You have done. I am meditating on what Your hands have done...** <sup>8</sup> **Cause me to hear about Your mercy in the morning! For I trust in You. Cause me to know the way on which I should go! For I have been lifting up my soul to You...** <sup>10</sup> **Teach me to do what You desire! For You are my God.**

That is the way it is with the true penitent. We need to keep from thinking of God as a fire extinguisher that we turn to only in an emergency and then put back in storage until another crisis arises. Our need for the Lord and His sustenance is not only in times of crisis, but it is also constant. As penitents, we realise that because of our sin and the enemies of Satan and this world, we continually need the Lord's sustenance, and so we continually thirst for the Lord.

David's weakness is overcome by thinking on the Lord's great redemptive works of the past. All that God has done in the past, in the "**days of long ago,**" together with His unfailing love, gives David confidence for the future.

David calls out to God, trusting that God will deliver him by providing sustenance for his troubled soul. David asks the Lord to **listen to (his) prayer,** and his **pleas for favour,** to answer him in **faithfulness and righteousness.**

God gives us His righteousness in Jesus Christ as He brings us to faith in Christ as our Saviour. That was a promise David hoped for, because for him the fulfillment of the coming Saviour was still in the future. But for us, this is a promise now fulfilled. The only-begotten Son of God fulfilled all righteousness for us. What we could not do because of our sinful condition, Jesus has done as true God and true man through His perfect life. Then this precious Holy Week, in these last holy days, He suffered all the evil that the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh could

dish out as He bore our sin on the cross. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.<sup>2</sup> He has taken away your sin! This forgiveness and atonement with God, together with the very righteousness of Christ, become yours and mine through faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. It is imputed to us by God through faith.

This faith is something that our faithful, righteous God brings and sustains in us as He feeds us with His Word and Sacraments. It is all by grace, and it is all God's doing. I'm sure we've all seen cartoons of some poor, lost soul crawling through a desert, vultures soaring overhead, as he longs for a pool of water from which to quench his thirst lest he die. He may even see what looks like water in the distance, shimmering over the sand. But, as he crawls closer, he realises it's only another mirage, a deceptive illusion. So it is with our thirst for God. We can't come to Him. We can't crawl to Him. We can do nothing to quench our own thirst. ***God comes to us with living water, our Saviour Jesus Christ.*** God comes to us in the water of Holy Baptism, bringing us new life in Christ. The triune God places His name on us in Holy Baptism, giving us faith, connecting us to Jesus' death and resurrection, and giving us the washing of regeneration as Christ's righteousness is thereby applied to us. God then continues to nourish us with His Word as we hear it read, as we hear it proclaimed, as we study it, and as we read it in our private devotions. He gives us nourishment to carry on, regularly assuring us that Jesus Christ is our Saviour, that we are more than conquerors through Christ.<sup>3</sup> And then again tonight, our Lord feeds us with His very body and blood in His Holy Supper. The very body and blood that tomorrow we'll see given and shed for us on the cross of Calvary, is given for us to eat and drink tonight for the forgiveness of our sins.

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<sup>2</sup> John 1:29

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:37

The Holy Spirit comes to us through the Means of Grace: God's Word and Sacraments, to bring us forgiveness, life, and salvation. His way is easy and pleasant. That's what David means when he asks of the LORD, "**May Your good Spirit lead me on level ground!**" Luther writes: "*The good Spirit [that David prays for] is the Holy Spirit. He creates gentle, kind, and good hearts, which walk the right path, on which they seek God in all things and not themselves,*" (AE 14:203).

David wraps up Psalm 143 with a plea for life and rescue from enemies: "**<sup>11</sup> For Your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life! In Your righteousness, bring my soul out of trouble! <sup>12</sup> In Your mercy You will silence my enemies, and destroy all who are hostile toward me! For I am Your servant.**" For God's name's sake, and not for our own, are we given life. All that we have is purely by God's grace, and so all that we are and all that we do is for His name's sake, for His glory. So regardless of what happens, we are His, and He will be glorified through us. During good times and bad, we have life in Christ, "*for if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's,*" (Rom 14:8). We are His workmanship, created in Christ to do what God has intended us to do, all to the glory of God.<sup>4</sup> David declares himself the Lord's servant, and so are we! But through Christ, we are not mere servants; we are the children of God and heirs of eternal life. We will have a seat at the banquet feast of the Lamb in heaven, not as servants, but as children of God, heirs of His kingdom.

This night on which our Lord was betrayed, we who are **parched and thirsting for** the Lord remember another psalm as we come to our Lord's Table: "*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!*" (Ps 34:8). Christ gives us Himself, His very body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine, for the

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<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:10

forgiveness of our sins. And, as you have been taught and believe, where there is forgiveness, there is the strengthening of faith and eternal life. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR MAUNDY THURSDAY

Almighty God, heavenly Father, we thank and praise You for Your goodness and loving kindness in sending to this needy world Jesus Christ, the bread from heaven. We praise You that you have enabled us to know You through Him.

Open our eyes that we may see ourselves as we really are in the mirror of Your holy Word, and grant us a sincere repentance. Nothing is hidden from You. You know our secret sins. Therefore we cast ourselves down before You, trust in Your mercy, and cling only to this, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from every sin. Forgive us our many transgressions. Grant that by faith we may grasp what Christ has done for us, and rejoice in the perfect peace of His pardon. Do not take Your Holy Spirit from us, but continue to make us glad that You have saved us. Satisfy our souls with the bread of life, and grant that through faith in Him we may never hunger again. Do not cast us from Your presence because of our faithlessness, but through Christ keep us for Your eternal kingdom. Help us to overcome pride and self-will, which disregard Jesus' example of humble service. Give us a ready mind and a pure heart to follow in His steps.

Bless Your Church, O Father. May all Your people be nourished by the true manna, which has come down from heaven, and given them the vision and strength to do Your will. Help Your Church to appreciate and use Your Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, through which Your Spirit brings salvation to all people.

May Your blessing rest on all who feel the burden of a guilty conscience, the pain of sickness, the ache of sorrow, the sadness of separation, and the sting of death. Give to all who seek Your gracious help the assurance of Your love and comforting presence, and, at the end, entrance into Your eternal glory.

As now we proclaim our Lord's passion and death in the communion between bread and Jesus' body and wine and Jesus' blood at His Table, unite us with Him and with each other in faith and fellowship. For there we are one body in Him. Assure us again of Your presence and Your mercy. Increase our joy and hope of heaven. Let Your Word and the Lord's Supper continually strengthen us during our pilgrimage on earth, until we finally share in the marriage supper of the Lamb for ever. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, whose saving death is our peace and hope until He comes. Amen.

### MAUNDY THURSDAY

Exodus 24:3-11

<sup>3</sup> When Moses came and recounted to all the people all the Words of the LORD and all the Ordinances, all the people answered with one voice: "We shall do all the things that the LORD has spoken."

<sup>4</sup> Then Moses wrote down all the Words of the LORD. He got up early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and also set up twelve pillars for the twelve

tribes of Israel. <sup>5</sup> Then he sent the young Israelite men, and they offered whole burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls, as fellowship offerings to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and he poured the other half out on the altar. <sup>7</sup> Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it aloud for the people to hear. They said, "We shall do all that the LORD has spoken, that we may be obedient."

<sup>8</sup> Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, “Look! The blood of the Covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these Words.”

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses went up, together with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel, <sup>10</sup> and they saw the God of Israel. Under His feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. <sup>11</sup> However, God did not stretch out His hand against the eminent men of Israel. They saw God, and they ate and drank.

Hebrews 9:11-22

<sup>11</sup> However, Christ has come as a High Priest of the good things that have been done, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, which has not been made by human hands, that is, not a part of this creation. <sup>12</sup> Moreover, not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood He entered once for all into the most holy place, when He

obtained eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For, if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer that are sprinkled on people who have been defiled make them holy, so that their bodies are clean, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, has offered Himself without blemish to God, make our consciences clean from dead works, so that we may serve the living God? <sup>15</sup> This is also why He is the Mediator of the new Covenant, in order that, after death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions under the first Covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. <sup>16</sup> For, where there is a testament, it is necessary that the death of the one who has made the testament must be established. <sup>17</sup> For a testament is in force after people have died, since it is never valid as long as the one who has made the testament is still alive. <sup>18</sup> That is why even

the first Covenant has not been inaugurated without blood. <sup>19</sup> For, after Moses had told all the people every Commandment in accordance with the Law, he took the blood of calves and goats, together with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people. <sup>20</sup> He said, “This is the blood of the Covenant, which God has commanded for you.” <sup>21</sup> Then in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and all the objects used in worship. <sup>22</sup> According to the Law almost everything is made clean by blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Matthew 26:17-30

<sup>17</sup> On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?”

<sup>18</sup> He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says, “My appointed

time is near. I shall celebrate the Passover at your house with My disciples”!’”

<sup>19</sup> So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and prepared the Passover. <sup>20</sup> When evening had come, He was reclining at the table with the Twelve.

<sup>21</sup> While they were eating, He said, “Truly, I tell you that one of you will betray Me.”

<sup>22</sup> They were very sad, and each one of them began to ask Him, “I am not the one, am I, Lord?”

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered, “He who has dipped his hand in the bowl with Me is the one who will betray Me. <sup>24</sup> The Son of Man is going as the Scriptures have said about Him, but how terrible for that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be better for that man if he had not been born.”

<sup>25</sup> Then Judas, who was betraying Him, asked, “I am not the one, am I, Rabbi?” Jesus told him, “You have said that.”

<sup>26</sup> While they were eating, Jesus took bread and gave thanks. He

broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat! This is My body.”

<sup>27</sup> He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you! <sup>28</sup> For this is My blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> For I tell you, I shall certainly not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it with you anew in My Father’s kingdom.”

<sup>30</sup> After they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.