

**A FINAL DECLARATION OF LOVE**  
**Sermon for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent, 2019**  
**Luke 22:31-38**

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 today is Luke 22:31-38: <sup>31</sup> **Then the Lord said, “Simon, Simon, look! Satan has asked for you people, to sift you like wheat. <sup>32</sup> However, I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers!”**

<sup>33</sup> **However, Peter told Him, “Lord, I am ready to go with You both to prison and to death.”**

<sup>34</sup> **Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day before you deny three times that you know Me.”**

<sup>35</sup> **Then Jesus asked them, “When I sent you out without a purse, or a bag, or sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?”**

**They answered, “Nothing!”**

<sup>36</sup> **He told them, “However, now the person who has a purse should take it, and also a bag! The person who does not have a sword should sell his garment and buy one! <sup>37</sup> For I tell you that this passage of Scripture must be fulfilled in Me, ‘He was numbered with transgressors.’ Yes, what has been written about Me is being fulfilled.”**

<sup>38</sup> **The disciples said, “Lord, look! Here are two swords.”**

**He told them, “That is enough.”**

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Once more, in this season of Lent, it is our privilege to accompany the Lord on His way of sorrows from Gethsemane to Golgotha. The six weeks prior to Easter, the season of Lent, is a time of penitence and prayer. It is also a time for us to dwell lovingly on all the details of those eventful hours in Jerusalem long, long ago. It was then that God’s eternal plan of salvation met with fulfilment. It was then that the crisis in humanity’s redemption was reached. If there were no Passion history, there would be no Church today, there would be no hope of heaven for sinners. That is why each phase of this story is so important, and that is why we must regard it as a distinct privilege to study this story in detail.

Over the course of today and the next 5 Sundays, our sermons are going to be based on chapters 22 and 23 of Luke’s Gospel. In these two chapters, Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives his account of Christ’s Passion.

The words from our text today, Luke 22:31-38, serve as an *introduction* to the actual Passion-story. Jesus and His disciples are still in the upper room, where the Passover has been celebrated and the Sacrament of Holy Communion instituted. The verses before us today contain a final declaration of love.

Awful hours of horror lay ahead of Jesus. He knew what was in store for Him. The anticipation of it had troubled His soul. Yet here in the upper room His thoughts were not on His own sufferings, but on that of His disciples. Jesus knew that His passion would be a terrible trial for His disciples because they were still weak and sinful men. So His heart went out to them. He warned them. He comforted them. He assured them. He said to Simon Peter, **“Simon, Simon, look! Satan has asked for you people, to sift you like wheat.** Satan must have been asking for permission to test the faith of *all the disciples*. Not being satisfied with his successful seduction of Judas, Satan had wanted them all.

In order to protect them, Jesus says, <sup>32</sup> **However, I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers!”** Even though he was warned, Peter still was quite confident. **Peter told Him, “Lord, I am ready to go with You both to prison and to death.”** How the devil must have laughed when he heard Peter’s speech! Sadly, the Lord had to say to him: **“I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day before you deny three times that you know Me.”** On that fateful day, when Judas and a large crowd from the chief priests and elders of the people came out to the Garden to arrest Jesus, all the disciples deserted Him and ran away.<sup>1</sup> This fulfilled a prophecy that Zechariah had made many years before. He had prophesied, *“Strike down the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered”* (Zech. 13:7), and of course, the prediction Jesus made about Peter denying Him three times before the rooster crowed, came to pass.<sup>2</sup>

However, the true intent of the words Jesus spoke here to Peter was to describe the relationship Peter would have with the other disciples. No question, Peter too was a sinner who falls from the faith, but Jesus also describes him as one who will be

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 26:47-56

<sup>2</sup> Luke 22:60

moved by the Lord to return, repent of his fall, and receive the forgiveness of sins. The main focus of Jesus' words is not on Peter's denial, but on his return to faithfulness and his leadership in strengthening the other disciples. Although Jesus does not designate one of the apostles as the most important, yet the command to strengthen his brothers was given to Peter. Later we see Peter in that leadership role in the early chapters of Acts, when the disciples are once again together in Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> Peter then boldly goes about warning against sin and the devil, and boldly proclaiming Christ crucified. In his Two Letters, Peter can be found urging his hearers to be self-controlled and alert, because the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. He urges his hearers to be strong in faith, and to resist him. And he further warns to be on our guard against the errors of false doctrine.<sup>4</sup> The Lord's prayer, that Simon Peter's **faith may not fail**, had indeed been answered.

So the Lord declared His love in warning the disciples and assuring Peter. That same declaration of love is intended for us, too. Satan still sifts souls, and the more devoted and faithful a Christian is, the more he is exposed to the devil's wiles. Remember Job? Job was blameless and upright, fearing God and shunning evil,<sup>5</sup> and with fierce determination Satan sought to ruin him. The Apostle Paul was battered by Satan's messenger.<sup>6</sup> Luther complained of many a bitter struggle with the old evil Foe. You and I are not exempt. Satan does not waste much time on unbelievers since they are already his, but for those who have faith, who trust in Jesus alone for salvation, he must win back to himself. How does he do this? Simple. He uses the same trick as he used in Eden when he whispers, "*Has God really said...?*" (Gen. 3:1). God has said that He will *never leave nor forsake us*, (Deut. 31:6). Yet, aren't there times in life when it feels as though He has left us? God says that *as far as the east is from the west, so all our sins have been removed* (Ps. 103:12), yet sins loom up so enormous and heinous that pardon appears to be impossible. Are all our sins really forgiven? At times the Christian Gospel and our faith in it seem utterly foolish. Satan whispers: "There never was a Son of God who died on the cross." "There is no God in heaven who loves." "The Christian life of service and sacrifice is a waste of time." "The Bible is nothing but a book of pious myths." "You deceive yourself if you believe in such fairy-tales." So Satan continues with all his lies, and we find ourselves with no solid ground under our feet. Instead, we find ourselves slipping into a bottomless abyss. Yet somehow, we manage to hold fast. We do not altogether lose God. It is not our own strength that saves us. It is the loving Christ, who in the hour of our sifting prays that our faith does not fail. And so, we know what Peter learned by experience. In fact, he even expressed it in his First Letter. He says, "*You are protected by God's power through faith, until you come to the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time,*" (1 Peter 1:5). Divine omnipotence is needed and granted to keep us weak followers of Jesus safe with Him even unto death. We must thank God for such love, and, after every sifting to go forth all the stronger to help others who are struggling and perhaps almost succumbing to similar temptations. We must tell them of that Lord who without ceasing intercedes for them, even as we know He has done for us.

The love of the Lord was further declared also in the question and in the command that He addressed to all His disciples. **Jesus asked them, "When I sent you out without a purse, or a bag, or sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They answered, "Nothing!"**

We know that the disciples, like Peter, vowed that they would be loyal to their Master even unto death. And so Jesus reminded them that whatever they may have done in the past, the future would assume such terrifying aspects that past loyalty could not be regarded as a precedent.

They had intimately shared His life. They had been His constant companions. They had gone forth with nothing and yet lacked nothing. He had provided for them abundantly. Those were the happy days when the guests were with the Bridegroom.<sup>7</sup> But these happy days had now ended. Great afflictions awaited them. The Lord pictured the future to them as a journey through a barren, inhospitable land. There would be none to receive them; rather would they be attacked. <sup>36</sup> **He told them, "However, now the person who has a purse should take it, and also a bag! The person who does not have a sword should sell his garment and buy one!** From now on they would have to go equipped with all necessities and armed against all emergencies, <sup>37</sup> **For I tell you that this passage of Scripture must be fulfilled in Me, 'He was numbered with transgressors.'** Yes, what has been written about Me is being fulfilled." He, their Lord, would be treated like a common criminal. Therefore, they needed to go armed.

**"Yes, what has been written about Me is being fulfilled."** All that the prophets had written would now be accomplished.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 1:12ff

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 5:8-9; 2 Peter 3:17

<sup>5</sup> Job 1:1

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:7

<sup>7</sup> Luke 5:34

The cross would be the culmination of prophecy. Isaiah, from whom our Lord quoted,<sup>8</sup> had clearly foreseen it: He would be led like a lamb to the slaughter. He would fulfil His destiny. He would achieve salvation for men. It was for this purpose that He had come upon earth and had been with His disciples these three lovely years, preparing and training them to be the heralds of that cross, to preach to all the world its unequalled and eternal meaning. They were to tell sinners far and wide that there is salvation in none other than the crucified Christ.<sup>9</sup> Their training was now at an end. They had graduated. Now they would have to go out into a world that would not welcome them, but, on the contrary, would persecute and kill them. Out of the quiet and seclusion of their learning from Jesus they would be thrust into the exacting task of preaching what they had seen and heard to men who did not want to hear it. For this they needed provision and weapons.

And still they were blind; still they did not know what the weapons of this warfare would be. Somewhere they succeeded in finding two swords. **“Lord, look! Here are two swords.”** How ignorant were the disciples! With the sword, with force of any kind, they could never conquer the world. What they needed was the *sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God* (Eph. 6:17). Jesus had announced as much to them when He quoted from the prophet Isaiah and declared that **what has been written about Me is being fulfilled**. Yet they came with these two swords! And the Lord? It almost seems as if He were either too much disgusted or too tired to explain the matter any farther. He simply closed the subject by saying: **“That is enough.”**

There is a reminder of His love for us in the question *“Is there anything we have lacked?”* We, too, must answer: **“Nothing!”** The Lord ALWAYS abundantly provides. While it is true that material things at times may have been lacking; yet in spiritual things the riches of His grace have been lavished upon us. We possess the greatest of all treasures, a heart established with grace. We know that God is with us and for us. We know that He loves us and leads us. We are sick, and the great Physician is at our side. We pass through darkness, and the Light of the world shines round about us. We stumble and fall, and He stands ready to raise us up. We enter the valley of the shadow of death, and we fear no evil; He is with us. Though poor, we are rich. Though sad, we are glad. Though weak, we are strong. Though dead, we are alive. *Nobody* has more than we have. In Christ all things are ours. In Christ, God is ours. Such are the riches that He bestows upon us who are sinners. Can there be greater love than that?

Of course, there are foes, and of course we must fight. We, too, need a sword. But His love provides that sword in His Word. Having this, we are equipped against all men and against all devils, yes, we are equipped against the evil in ourselves. The better you know your Bible, the more secure you will be, no matter what situation may arise. Physical strength is a broken reed. Force of any kind will not avail. Only with the Sword of the Spirit can we conquer.

So the Lord, about to start off on His pilgrimage of pain, declared His love to His disciples. And as we begin another Lenten season, He declares that same love to us. May we never doubt it, but firmly relying on it, march on, often in sorrow, often in woe, yet ever advancing toward the goal of a blessed eternity. That love is unwavering and will safely lead us there. Amen.

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

#### PRAYER FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty God, heavenly Father, since every good gift comes from You, we approach You in prayer in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ our Saviour. Though we are ashamed because we are unworthy, we come with faith and confidence in Your fatherly love and mercy.

We thank You that You have given us Jesus Christ as our high priest. He knows our weaknesses, for He bore them. He knows our temptations, for He endured them, and learnt obedience by what He suffered. Grant that we may show our loyalty to You by absolute loyalty to all Your words.

Lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world, cleanse us from our sins, and teach us obedience. Take away from us all desire to follow any will but Yours. Fill us with faith and love, that we may gladly believe and follow Your Word. Give us such trust in our heavenly Father's protection that we always rejoice as we walk in His ways.

Holy Spirit of God, when we are led into the wilderness of testing, deliver us by Your power, and save us from the evil on every hand. Give us Your strength, and by the example of Jesus show us the victorious power of God's Word.

Strengthen and bless Your Church. We praise You for the privilege of being co-workers with You to save people. Help us not to waste the grace of God that we ourselves have already received. Open the door of opportunity for us. Fill us with a faith that claims Your grace each day and then moves us to proclaim it to others. Because Your Gospel can make many

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 53:12

<sup>9</sup> Acts 4:12

people rich, give us joy in our witnessing, no matter what sacrifices we suffer.

Uphold our homes by the Gospel. Empower all parents to be true followers of Jesus, the light of the world, so that their example of faith and obedience may help their children also to know and follow Jesus.

Bring shame and discredit on those who advocate abortion, homosexuality and single-sex unions, and instead, fill the leaders of the nations with Your light and dispel the darkness of sin and spiritual ignorance, giving wisdom and strength to all in authority in our country, that they may serve according to Your direction, and our people may live in unity and uprightness. Lead people everywhere to enjoy peace and happiness as they learn to love and follow You.

Be with all those who suffer, and let them know Your concern and compassion. Be with those who grieve, and comfort them with Your promises. Be with those whose earthly pilgrimage is coming to an end, and fill them with the sure hope of eternal life in Christ.

Show compassion upon our land and bring a swift end to the drought.

O Father, watch over all Your people, and bring us safely through this world to the kingdom that You have prepared for all who love You. We pray all these things in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

<sup>1</sup> “When you enter the land that the LORD, your God, is giving you as an inheritance and you take possession of it and live in it, <sup>2</sup> you shall take some of the first from all the produce of the ground, which you will harvest from your land, which the LORD, your God, is giving you! You shall put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD, your God, will choose to make His name dwell! <sup>3</sup> You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and tell him, ‘I declare today to the LORD, your God, that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our forefathers to give us!’ <sup>4</sup> Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD, your God! <sup>5</sup> You shall make this response before the LORD, your God: ‘My forefather was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt with few people and lived as a foreigner there. There he became a great, powerful and numerous nation. <sup>6</sup> However, the Egyptians treated us harshly, oppressed us and imposed severe forced labour on us. <sup>7</sup> Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our forefathers, and the LORD heard our cry. He saw our misery, distress and oppression. <sup>8</sup> The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. <sup>9</sup> He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. <sup>10</sup> So now, look! I have brought the first produce of the land, which You, O LORD, have given me.’ Then you shall set it down before the LORD, your God, and worship before the LORD, your God! <sup>11</sup> Then you shall be glad about all the good things that the LORD, your God, has given to you and your family, together with the Levite and the foreigner who is living among you!

Romans 10:8b-13

<sup>8b</sup> “The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.” This is the Word of faith, which we are preaching, <sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you

will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart a person believes, so that he is counted righteous and with the mouth a person confesses and then he is saved. <sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says, “The person who believes in Him will not be put to shame.” <sup>12</sup> For there is no difference between Jew and Greek. For the same Lord is over them all and gives His riches to all who call on Him. <sup>13</sup> For “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Luke 4:1-13

<sup>1</sup> Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, <sup>2</sup> where the Devil continued to tempt Him for forty days. He ate nothing during those days and, when they were over, He was very hungry.

<sup>3</sup> The Devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread!”

<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered him, “Scripture has said, ‘A person will not live by bread alone.’”

<sup>5</sup> The Devil took Him up and, in a moment, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup> The Devil told Him, “I shall give You all this authority and glory, because it has been given to me, and I give it to anyone to whom I please. <sup>7</sup> So, if You worship me, all this will be Yours.”

<sup>8</sup> Jesus answered him, “Scripture has said, ‘Worship the Lord, your God, and serve Him only!’”

<sup>9</sup> The Devil took Him into Jerusalem and had Him stand on the summit of the Temple. The Devil told Him, “If You are the Son of God, jump down from here! <sup>10</sup> For Scripture has said: ‘He will order His angels about you, to watch over you carefully. <sup>11</sup> They will carry you in their hands and never let you stub your foot against a stone.’”

<sup>12</sup> Jesus answered him, “Scripture has said, ‘You shall not put the Lord, your God, to a test!’”

<sup>13</sup> When the Devil had finished every way of tempting Him, he left Him until another opportunity would present itself.