

Hymn 140

1. Jesus, I will ponder now
On Thy holy Passion;
With Thy Spirit me endow
For such meditation.
Grant that I in love and faith
May the image cherish
Of Thy suff'ring, pain, and death
That I may not perish.
2. Make me see Thy great distress,
Anguish, and affliction,
Bonds and stripes and
wretchedness
And Thy crucifixion;
Make me see how scourge and rod,
Spear and nails, did wound Thee,
How for man Thou diedst, O God,
Who with thorns had crowned Thee.
3. Yet, O Lord, not thus alone
Make me see Thy Passion,
But its cause to me make known
And its termination.
Ah! I also and my sin
Wrought Thy deep affliction;
This indeed the cause hath been
Of Thy crucifixion.
4. Grant that I Thy Passion view
With repentant grieving
Nor Thee crucify anew
By unholy living.
How could I refuse to shun
Ev'ry sinful pleasure
Since for me God's only Son
Suffered without measure?
5. If my sins give me alarm
And my conscience grieve me,
Let Thy cross my fear disarm,
Peace of conscience give me.
Grant that I may trust in Thee
And Thy holy Passion.
If His Son so loveth me,
God must have compassion.
6. Grant that I may willingly
Bear with Thee my crosses,
Learning humbleness of Thee,
Peace mid pain and losses.
May I give Thee love for love!
Hear me, O my Savior,
That I may in heav'n above
Sing Thy praise forever.

Hymn 342

1. Chief of sinners though I be,
Jesus shed His blood for me;
Died that I might live on high,
Lived that I might never die,
As the branch is to the vine,
I am His, and He is mine.
2. Oh, the height of Jesus' love!
Higher than the heavens above,
Deeper than the depths of sea,
Lasting as eternity.
Love that found me--wondrous
thought!--
Found me when I sought Him not.
3. Jesus only can impart
Balm to heal the smitten heart;
Peace that flows from sin forgiven,
Joy that lifts the soul to heaven;
Faith and hope to walk with God
In the way that Enoch trod.
4. Chief of sinners though I be,
Christ is All in all to me;
All my wants to Him are known,
All my sorrows are His own.
Safe with Him from earthly strife,
He sustains the hidden life.
5. O my Savior, help afford
By Thy Spirit and Thy Word!
When my wayward heart would
stray,
Keep me in the narrow way;
Grace in time of need supply
While I live and when I die.

Hymn 371

1. Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

2. Bold shall I stand in that great Day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully through these absolved I am
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

3. The holy, meek, unspotted Lamb,
Who from the Father's bosom came,
Who died for me, e'en me t'atone,
Now for my Lord and God I own.

4. Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
Which at the mercy-seat of God
Forever doth for sinners plead,
For me--e'en for my soul--was shed.

5. Lord, I believe were sinners more
Than sands upon the ocean shore,
Thou hast for all a ransom paid,
For all a full atonement made.

6. When from the dust of death I rise
To claim my mansion in the skies,
E'en then, this shall be all my plea:
Jesus hath lived and died for me.

7. Jesus, be endless praise to Thee,
Whose boundless mercy hath for me,
For me, and all Thy hands have made,
An everlasting ransom paid.

Maundy Thursday 2020

Texts: Mark 14:22-15; Luke 22:21-24; John 13:2-5, 14

Dear Fellow Christians: Where do you turn in times of trouble? In whom or in what do you trust? As a Christian you know the correct answer: **"My help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth."** That's the right answer, of course, but unfortunately it doesn't always give an accurate picture of the way things really are in our hearts and minds at any given moment. We're seeing more and more evidence of our misguided trust in connection with our current national troubles. What we are encouraged, even *commanded* to do, is to trust not God but science. In fact "science" has been trending for quite some time as the acceptable god of choice for our society.

Don't misunderstand. Pure "science" is just the study of God's creation, and there's obviously nothing wrong with that. Yet like everything that man touches, "science" has been twisted, manipulated, and elevated to an almost god-like status: *"In science we trust!" "Science will save us!" "Science is the answer to all of man's problems!"* God has blessed us through *true* science, and true scientific discovery, but science in the absence of God is just foolishness. That's the sort of "settled science" that told us that by this year, 2020, the polar bears would be virtually extinct, the polar icecaps would have melted, and our coastal cities would be under water. It's that "settled science" that tells us we evolved originally from worms, that man created God, and that there could be no such thing as a virgin birth or resurrection from the dead. More to the point on this Maundy Thursday evening, it's that sort of false science that denies what God himself says about that special gift he gave us on this night – the Lord's Supper.

So it is this evening that we examine true settled science, the Word of God, as we allow the One who made all things to teach us something about one of his special gifts, one of his special creations. The texts (this evening we use three) that will form the basis for our Maundy Thursday meditation are found in the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John:

Mark 14:22-25 *And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body."* ²³ *And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it.* ²⁴ *And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."* ²⁵ *Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."* Luke 22:21-24 *But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table.* ²² *For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!"* ²³ *And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.* ²⁴ ¶ *A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.* John 13:2-5,14 *During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him,* ³ *Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God,* ⁴ *rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.* ⁵ *Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.* ¹⁴ *If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.*

These are the verbally inspired words of our God. Humbly asking our God to bless our study of His Word, so we pray, **"Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

One of the most exciting aspects of the Christian faith comes with the realization that our lives are guided by the unseen hand of our God. In the 31st Psalm David wrote these simple, powerful words: **"My times are in your hand."** We take great comfort in that passage especially when God determines that the time of grace of one of his loved ones has come to an end. Certainly that is fitting. Yet it is also both appropriate and exhilarating to hear and apply these words to every moment of our earthly walk. Our God does not just determine when we die; he directs our lives with an unseen and yet all-powerful hand.

Think about it. What in life could be more moving, more thrilling, more comforting than to know that God is in control? Throughout the pages of Holy Scripture we are assured in nearly every imaginable way that our God is intimately connected to us – living within us, in fact – and actually knows us better than we know ourselves. On the one hand he tells us that **"the very hairs of our heads are numbered."** Just listen and marvel at how personally and thoroughly you and I are known:

Psalm 139:7-16: "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," ¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. ¹³ For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."

The godless hear such things and tremble, for the idea that God sees past their outward façade and knows their sin is a terror to them. You and I, on the other hand, hear this as the very best possible news. Far better than any insurance coverage or vaccine, God's doesn't just cover us in case of a random accident or catastrophe, he himself controls every event, *controls the catastrophe* – allowing or disallowing according to his infinite wisdom.

How thrilling then to be able to simply enjoy the ride that is life under God's all-powerful protection and guidance. This is a good thing, by the way, since as you grow older it seems that you come to recognize more and more that many of the great and pivotal moments in life tend to come and go without our understanding the importance of the moment.

We miss the here and now because we are too distracted. Often only time will give us the proper perspective. You make, for example, a rather arbitrary decision to go somewhere or do something and there you meet your future spouse. You have breakfast with that spouse for what seems like the 10,000th time in a row (taking that and so many other things for granted) and are shocked later that same day to realize that that was the last meal, the last moments, you will share together. You send a child off to college never fully realizing the permanent change that has taken place *at that moment*. You participate in a group effort like a building project, an annual family vacation, or a regular get-together with special friends and never consciously recognize what a bright, shining time that truly is, or was, until long after the fact.

While, again, the panic level of the godless is generally kicked into overdrive by such thoughts – creating a sense of alarm that they might miss out, or make the wrong decision just at the critical moment – God's children can and should thrill to the realization that when we focus on that "one thing needful," God himself will take care of the rest. God himself has promised to work all things for our eternal good. How fascinating then - how exhilarating - to be able to focus on the present and to seek to recognize the great things of the moment, and to marvel at the direction God gives to your life.

So it is also that we wonder if the Apostles recognized the times and the events in which they were living. You and I read about them now on the pages of our Bibles, and the very fact that these events are there recorded verifies their critical place in the history of mankind. Yet I wonder what those disciples thought *at the time*. Could they possibly have realized that hundreds of millions of souls would hear and read their names and study the events in which they participated? Could they possibly have known how God the Holy Spirit would use their words and actions (both positive and negative) to guide and instruct untold generations until God himself folds up the blanket of time?

To that end it seems hard to imagine that the Apostles fully comprehended that what they experienced in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday was no less than the absolutely

unique experience of hearing the very Son of God who, while still living, spoke to them the words of his last will and testament.

My guess – because the evidence certainly seems to support it – is that the Apostles really didn't comprehend the magnitude of the events they witnessed on Maundy Thursday. Really, how could they? The evidence that supports the idea that they did not understand includes the part of our text from Luke's Gospel where we read about their internal power struggle regarding "***which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.***" Not one of them would want such an unseemly episode added to his résumé for countless generations to read and analyze. The Bible is full of such "failures of the moment." Eve thought one piece of fruit couldn't hurt. Aaron thought one silly statue in the form of a calf would be no big deal. Eli condemned the prayers of Hannah as drunkenness. His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, thought it a great plan to carry the Ark of the Covenant into battle against the Philistines. Jephthah decided, on oath, to sacrifice the first person that came out of the door of his house, not stopping to think it could be his own daughter. Belshazzar imagined it a solid idea to party with the Lord's sacred vessels while an enemy army camped outside. Pilate thought it no big deal to condemn one innocent Jew.

The foolishness of these actions all became apparent only after the fact, and the full import of each of them was usually only seen *long* after the fact. The same held true with the events of Maundy Thursday. As yet the Apostles hadn't failed, hadn't fled, hadn't denied. As yet Jesus hadn't even died. How then could they possibly have recognized the importance of his institution of the Lord's Supper and the giving of his very body and blood? In the Upper Room they were still obsessed with the notion of an earthly kingdom where *they themselves would rule*. How could they possibly understand the meaning and import of Jesus getting on *his* knees to wash *their* feet? It clearly had not yet dawned on them that they had been called to a life of service and hardship which, in all but one case, would end violently in their own martyrdom.

So also we should not find it surprising that you and I are still struggling to grasp the full meaning of the events of the moment, the

events we commemorate this evening. The facts of Maundy Thursday are this: Christ called us to a life of humble service; a life that is to be dedicated to the service of God and our neighbor. That's the foot-washing aspect of Maundy Thursday. Recognizing that such an existence would be difficult in the extreme, he also on this night gave to his Church a perpetual reminder that our forgiveness is complete through faith in Jesus Christ. That's the Lord's Supper aspect of the event we commemorate this evening. What we learn from all of this is that we do not walk through life with sins on our account - sins that are only occasionally removed by some specific actions on our part (leaving our souls in great peril in between those moments when we stand fully forgiven). We stand now and forever as holy and sinless in his sight through faith in the sacrifice Jesus made for us. Our God has simply decided to reaffirm that fact, to restate it, in different ways – one of which is the Lord's Supper. What he therefore instituted on Maundy Thursday is the assurance, the seal, the receipt of a bill already paid in full – *and he has thereby freed us for lives of thankful service in his kingdom.*

All of this should then combine to remind us that we are indeed living in special, wonderful times. Nothing but a bit of time stands between us and our eternal home. Nothing, not even the very power of hell and all the devil's minions, can now defeat or destroy those whom Jesus has chosen to be his own. While the clock ticks down to the final trumpet, Jesus himself has promised never to leave or forsake us. "Science" can't provide this, but God can, and he has promised that he will. God the Father has promised to provide everything that he, in his infinite wisdom, knows that we need. What is left to you and me then is simply to serve, in part by telling others of the good things that *are already* ours and *can be* theirs. Focus on such things, and pray that God the Holy Spirit would open your eyes to those bright, shining moments in time when *he* works through *our* simple, humble witness to carry others from death to life. This is the service to which the Apostles were called on Maundy Thursday, and it is the very same service we have been called to share with them. God grant success to our humble efforts, for Jesus' sake. Amen.