

Maundy Thursday, 4.9.2020
Theme: The Battle Is Personal
Text: Luke 22:47,48

Greeting in the name of Jesus,

Dear Peace family, You are probably beginning to make plans for how you will celebrate Easter. Certainly, it will be a different Easter than we've ever experienced. But our joy need not be any less since our joy is based on these facts: Christ died and rose from the dead and secured our salvation. While our Easter celebration is modified this year, those facts never change. That story of Jesus' journey to the cross is filled with so many truths for our everyday Christian life...The events of Thursday in Holy Week teach us so much...

Right now we are fighting a battle to stay physically healthy. We are doing everything we can to protect ourselves and others. But more often than not, there is bigger struggle going on within, right? Today we are reminded that the spiritual battle within is personal, it is a daily battle our sinful nature. The devil is constantly trying to turn us against Jesus.

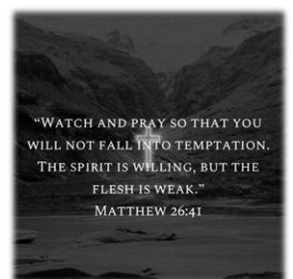
It was right after Jesus and the disciples had their last meal together. They had gone out to the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives. There, Jesus prayed. When he finished, he returned to his disciples, who had fallen asleep. Jesus woke them, and **"while he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?'" (Luke 22:47,48).**

Is there a sadder legacy than that of Judas? The struggle was evident in Judas' life, especially at the end of Judas' life. We know Judas had begun to help himself to the purse of money meant to support Jesus and his disciples. It didn't happen overnight. It probably started with something small, and the problem grew and grew to where his love for money overtook love for Jesus.

But the battle is real in all of us, isn't it? St. Paul put it this way, **"In my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" (Romans 7:22-24).**¹

Did you catch his reference to the spiritual war going on inside us? I so want to trust Jesus with all my heart, but my faith is under attack. My sinful flesh is weak. As Jesus told his disciples, **"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak"** (Matthew 26:41).

And so is yours. Sometimes there is guilt from the past. You get flashbacks, things you remember that make you squirm and you feel unworthy of Jesus. Maybe it is going on right now. Do you live with a disappointment right now because things aren't going the way you thought things would go? The devil can certainly use events like this virus and being at home, he can work depressing thoughts that work against your faith. He can cause us to lose a cheerful spirit basing our joy and contentment on something other than Jesus? Have you been getting spiritually lethargic? Even though there is more time at home, do you spend more time listening to and studying God's Word? And your prayer life? Do you follow Jesus' command, "Watch and pray that you do not fall into temptation?" **"The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."**



In this personal battle, we agree with St. Paul: **"Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25).**

Jesus is the defense against our sinful flesh and Satan's battle for our hearts. Our betrayed Jesus never betrayed us! He went through all that physical abuse alone. And then, also alone, went before God's judgment bar, piled high with our sins, to experience the full misery of hell in our place, with the prize in his sight of earning full forgiveness for every sin we've ever committed.

When Jesus voluntarily gave up his life on the cross, God cleared sinners of every charge against you, me, and of the entire world. The only thing that God sees in us is the holy, perfect life of Jesus! He has made that freely available to all who turn to him in faith.

Now, thankfully we are not alone in our personal battles. Jesus is the starting and ending point in our personal battle against the devil trying to weasel his way into our life and take control.

1. The first is his powerful Word with all those promises. That Word is a two-edged sword as it exposes all the stuff we try to keep hidden and, at the same time, it cuts away all the guilt as it brings Jesus into sharp focus . . . our dear Jesus, the heart of the Bible! God's Word makes our faith stronger to resist the devil. It's both our armor and offensive weapon (Ephesians 6).
2. Second, God provides us with a special meal. He provides each of us personally with his true body and blood. We look forward to gathering again soon so we can enjoy the personal assurance that the Lord's Supper gives us. It's as close as we can possibly get to him this side of heaven. It's as if we were in that upper room when Jesus looked at each of the disciples assuring them in that Last Supper, Take this, it is for you! Do you see yourself there—at the end of the table? Whenever we feel we are slipping in my struggle with the devil, this meal points me back to Jesus. He gives me the forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation that he has battled to win for me. My battle against Satan is personal, but so is this Supper: your Savior's flesh and blood with the bread and wine to strengthen me.
3. Third, the Holy Spirit is working within you with the gospel to strengthen you in your battle with Satan and sin. We are all receiving the Holy Spirit's work in our lives through the Word of God. When we are together with the believers the Spirit is at work as we build up and encourage one another. We encourage one another to stay close to Jesus and his Word so that our faith might grow and get stronger, when we commune with one another. We show our concern and care for one another, and pray for one another's needs as we express our Christ-centered love in real words and real actions.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, in the Sacrament of Holy Communion you give us your true body and blood as a remembrance of your suffering and death on the cross. Grant us so firmly to believe your words and promise that we may always partake of this Sacrament to our eternal good. We look forward to the day we can receive this special gift with our brothers and sisters. Keep us and all we love safe during this pandemic. Bless those who administer physical care to those who are sick. We thank you for the gift of your Word by which you continue to strengthen and uphold us. Help us keep our eyes fixed on you dear Jesus, our living Savior. Amen.

Look for our Good Friday service to be posted on Good Friday evening. Plan to log on to view worship at 10 AM on Easter Sunday morning. There will also be a special sunrise message at 7:30 AM. God be with you until we meet again.

¹ Professor Panning's translation/interpretation is excellent here: "But I see another pattern at work in the members of my body, waging war against the control my new self tries to exert and making me a prisoner of sin's control" (The People's Bible: *Romans*, p. 122).