

John 19:31–37
Good Friday (Tenebrae)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
March 29, 2024

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

All week, we've been looking at the accounts of Christ's passion, the accounts of His suffering and death, from the four Gospel writers. On Palm Sunday we heard from St. Matthew, on Monday from St. Mark, Wednesday from St. Luke, and earlier today, at the Tre Ore service, from St. John. On each day, we've considered a distinctive element from each Gospel account. This evening, we meditate on the blood and water that flowed from the side of Jesus in John 19:34, a detail specific to the Gospel according to St. John.

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for the Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.

Death by crucifixion often meant death by suffocation, though there were other possibilities. A person who was nailed to a cross had to lift his entire body weight to breathe. That's what the supporting beam for the feet was for. But eventually, the crucified would become too tired and breathe his last. To speed up the process a bit, the legs of the crucified could be broken so they had no possibility of lifting their weight to breathe. Death would ensue within minutes. That's what the Jews asked Pilate to do since they wanted everything cleaned up and in good order to rest on the Sabbath. What a twisted irony. The one who commands Sabbath rest, the one who is our Sabbath rest, is discarded like a sick animal so the perpetrators can take their rest.

The soldiers came and broke the legs of the other criminals, but Jesus had already given up His Spirit and breathed His last. Maybe the loss of blood from the beatings and the lashings made Him go quicker? Maybe the exhaustion and the wrath of God upon Him hastened the end. Regardless, Jesus's life is not taken from Him. He lays it down of His own accord. He laid down His life in such a way that the Scriptures would be fulfilled, that the Old Testament prophecies would find their fulfillment. Jesus was already dead, so the soldiers didn't have to break His legs. This fulfills two Old Testament prophecies. From Exodus 12:46: "Not one of His bones will be broken." This is a reference to the Passover Lamb. Jesus is the true Passover Lamb. God told the people of Israel not to break any bones of the Passover sacrifice, a clear foreshadowing of the death of Jesus.

Jesus was already dead, so there was no need to break His legs. But to verify the death, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. This fulfills the prophecy from Zechariah 12:10. There, God says: "I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that when they look on me, on Him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over Him, as one weeps over a firstborn." God says: "when they look *on me* whom they have pierced." God became man so that He could be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. In Jesus Christ, we can say without any hesitation: "God was pierced. God died for us." As we sing in the hymn, "O sorrow dread, our God is dead." The Son of God the Father became one of us to buy us back from slavery by spilling His blood for us. He is the firstborn Lamb, whose blood covers the doorframes of our hearts. He is the only-begotten Son of the Father, who gives us life through His death. And He sends us the Holy Spirit, who cries out within us for mercy in His blood.

When Jesus was pierced, blood and water flowed from His side. Medically speaking, this is called pericardial effusion, a result of the torture and intense suffering Jesus was undergoing. But John is not just describing the scene this way to give medical information. The water and the blood are significant, in the Gospel of John and throughout the Scriptures. From the very beginning of the Scriptures there is water. The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Where there's water, there's life. But water also brings death and destruction in the Flood. God then leads His people safely through the Red sea while drowning hard hearted Pharaoh and his armies. In John 3, Jesus says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." Jesus is referring to Baptism, which is the washing of regeneration, or rebirth, and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Water is life.

Blood is also life. After the Flood, God told Noah he could eat the flesh of animals, but not their blood. God said: "you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (Gen 9:6). And "whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed." In Leviticus 17:11, God commands His people to offer animal sacrifices on the altar because "it is the blood that makes atonement by the life." The life is in the blood. As Hebrews 9 explains, the blood of the covenant was sprinkled on basically everything having to do with Temple worship: "under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." Even the people were sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice on the day of Atonement. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

There is life in the water and there is life in the blood. Jesus gives us His life in the water and the blood that flow from His pierced side. In John's Gospel, the water from the side of Christ is a picture of Baptism, the water of new birth in the Holy Spirit. And the blood coming out of His pierced body is a picture of the Lord's Supper, where we eat Christ's Body and drink His

Blood, because the life is in the blood. He is the sacrifice who gives us not only His flesh to eat, but also His blood to drink. That's why many medieval and Reformation era depictions of the crucifixion portray angels with bowls and chalices to collect the water and the blood flowing from the pierced side of Jesus. We are bathed in that water in Baptism and we are given that Blood to drink at the Altar. That's where Jesus unites us the most intimately with Himself, as a husband uniting Himself to His Bride.

In fact, the origins of the Church in the blood and water from the side of Christ can be seen as a fulfillment of the creation of woman and the first marriage. Remember that Jesus is the second Adam, the true Adam. There was no helper suitable for the first Adam, so the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Him. In the Scriptures, sleep is often a picture of death. While Adam slept, the LORD took a rib from Adam's side and from that rib he formed the first woman, Eve, the mother of all the living. When Adam woke up, he saw Eve and said: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man." As woman was taken out of man, so do man and woman unite again in marriage that life might flourish.

As Adam slept, so did Jesus sleep the sleep of death. As a rib came from Adam's side, so did water and blood flow from the side of Christ. As God used the rib to form a Bride for Adam, so does God use the water and the blood to form a Bride for Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom. That Bride is you, the Church. You are the bride of Christ, born of the water and blood. Christians are born in Baptism and they are cherished and nourished as the Body of Christ in the Lord's Supper. The Sacraments tie us directly to the events of Calvary. To this day, we live from the water and the blood.

As John says later, in his first epistle, ch. 5: “This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.” In the water and the blood from the side of Jesus God gives you eternal life, a daily cleansing from sin by the power of the Holy Spirit, until the final resurrection of all flesh. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.