

## **“Be Prepared”**

Liturgical Date: Maundy Thursday

Primary Text: Exodus 12:1-14, 1 Corinthians 11:23-32, St. Mark 14:12-26

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. This evening’s sermon will draw on our Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel Lessons. The title is “Be Prepared.”

Be Prepared. If you were a Boy Scout, as I was, you probably recognize those two words as the Scout Motto. It tells you to be ready, ready for anything. Our Lord on that first Maundy Thursday needed to be prepared for what lay ahead for Him and we as His followers must be prepared for what He has called us to and promised to us.

In our Old Testament Lesson from Exodus 12, The Lord tells Moses and Aaron to make sure that the people of Israel were prepared. The angel of the Lord would be coming to bring death to the firstborn. But if they were prepared by applying the blood sacrifice to their doors, they would be shielded from this judgment. The blood served as a covering for them, protecting from death. The Egyptians who did not obey the command of the one true God would not be spared from judgment. Wails of anguish would arise throughout the land as the first born was struck dead. Finally, Pharaoh would release the children of Israel from slavery. And the Jewish people were to be prepared to celebrate this day when YHWH protected them and freed them in every year going forward. This would be the Passover.

Almost 1500 years later, Jesus and His Disciples were preparing to celebrate this same feast day, just as faithful Jews had done for centuries. Jesus’ ministry had been one of preparation for the ultimate goal of saving humanity from sin. He was preparing to be the perfect Passover lamb, the sacrifice for the atonement of

sins. He would not just cover sins, but wash them away by forgiving them eternally. On that Passover, the first Maundy Thursday night, Jesus would show Himself the humble servant by washing His disciples' feet and sharing the Passover meal with them as the host and the feast itself. Jesus would pray to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane that if there be any other way, that the cup of suffering would pass from Him. But there was no other way. The only perfect sacrifice must be God Himself, in human flesh, taking the place of sinful humanity.

Jesus must be prepared for betrayal by one of His Disciples, to face both the religious and civil authorities, to face a perversion of justice, for a crown of thorns, a brutal scourging, a forced march to Calvary, and a slow and painful death on the cross. Even more painful than the physical anguish is that He must be prepared to bear the sins of the whole world. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us, *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”* As Jesus had to be prepared for His Passion, He was also prepared for victory. Three days after His death, He would rise victorious on that first Easter morning in defeat of sin, death, and the devil.

On that first Maundy Thursday, in the Passover that He shared with His Disciples, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Altar. This is also known as Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, the Breaking of the Bread, the Lord's Table, and the Mass. In this sacred meal we are privileged to join with Jesus and our fellow believers, by eating and drinking the very body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine. But we must be prepared to come to the Lord's Table. Our Epistle Lesson from 1 Corinthians made that abundantly clear. Verse 28 admonishes us to “examine ourselves” and verse 27 warns that those who come to the Lord's Table unworthily are guilty of sinning against the very body and blood of the Lord. In verse 29 it says that those who do so drink “damnation” upon themselves. This is not picture language, we receive the very

body and blood of Jesus and commune discerning that this is what is happening. Since this is so important and serious, how then are we prepared? Who should come to feast at the Lord's Table?

Communion should be a joyous, but at the same time reverent occasion that we, as Jesus commanded, "Do in remembrance" of Him. Be prepared by confessing the Christian faith, knowing that Jesus Christ died for you. Be prepared by confessing your sins to God and receiving His forgiveness in faith. In just a little while, we will utilize the "Christian Questions with Their Answers" in the Service. Although the first copy we have of them does not appear until 1551, five years after Martin Luther's death, they are attributed to him-and they certainly reflect what He taught about the Sacrament and being prepared to receive it worthily. When you answer those questions, do so thoughtfully and prayerfully. Do not just repeat them without thinking on what they mean and what you believe. If you can answer them rightly and truthfully, then you can be assured that you come to the Sacrament well examined and well prepared.

Be prepared to receive that which Christ has for us in the Sacrament. He has given His life-giving body and blood, given for us for the forgiveness of sins. He gives love and forgiveness to the penitent heart. Jesus strengthens our faith in the Sacrament of the Altar. He strengthens our faith toward Him and toward our fellow man as we reach out to assist them in Christian love.

Christ on the first Maundy Thursday was prepared to go forth and accomplish that for which the Father had sent Him, and us as His children on this evening prepare to receive Him in the sacred meal of forgiveness that He has provided for us.

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

Amen.