

Sermon for April 2, 2026 – Maundy Thursday

Hebrews 5:7-9 (EHV)

⁷ In the days of his flesh, he offered prayers and pleas with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was the Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. ⁹ After he was brought to his goal, he became the source of eternal salvation for everyone who obeys him.

Even at a distance, he could be heard lamenting, crying out loud prayers to God. He begged and pleaded with him to change the inevitable. The LORD can do anything, right? So why not take his suffering away? His loud cries and tearful whimpering revealed such anguish in his heart that it would have been hard not to feel sympathy for this man agonizing in prayer.

Who is this person, and why is he offering such bitter tears?

Is he a man struggling with stage four cancer? Or a father at the bedside of a child who is dying? Or a teenager overwhelmed with anxiety?

This man could be any of those people, but he isn't. Truth be told, he is the last person you would ever expect agonizing in prayer.

Who is this man crying so bitterly?

He is Jesus, your Saviour, praying in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his crucifixion. And what a comfort it is to know this!

“A comfort?” You might ask, “How can the anguish Jesus felt in the Garden of Gethsemane be a comfort?” It is a comfort because it shows us that our Messiah didn't just save us from sin, feeling nothing. No, He was tempted and troubled in every way – just like we are. We have a Christ who can sympathize with us in our weaknesses because he experienced them himself.¹ Let us consider these things under the theme:

Jesus is our sympathetic High Priest.

He willingly drank the cup of suffering to fill our cup with blessing.

Our sermon text is from a portion of the book of Hebrews that explains why Jesus is our great High Priest. God the Father appointed him before the creation of the world to be subjected to our weakness so that he might offer the perfect sacrifice needed to atone for our sins. We will focus on the details of that sacrifice tomorrow. Today, on Maundy Thursday, we want especially to consider the weakness to which God subjected Jesus, because of which we are saved.

To what sort of weakness did God the Father subject his Son?

He subjected him to the horror of our sins and the terrible punishment we deserve because of them.

Think about your sins for a moment – the pain they caused others, the shame you feel, and the guilt that weighs heavily on you because of them. Now think about the punishment you deserve because of them – everlasting separation from God in hell, where the worm will not die, nor the fire be quenched. It's horrifying, isn't it? Even though I know God's verdict is just, my sinful nature tempts me to lash out against God for being unfair or too wrathful, or it tempts me to lose all hope in God's promise of grace.

Now, if the thought of God's wrath over sin terrifies us, who deserve it, just imagine how abhorrent it is to the sinless Son of God, who did nothing to deserve guilt, death, and hell; and yet had to face them for our sake! Jesus is perfectly holy. Sin repulses him more than water repels oil. And yet, for our salvation's sake, God supernaturally imputed all our sins to Jesus – as Isaiah prophesied:

*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*ⁱⁱ

This is the weakness to which God the Father subjected his Son: He made him, who perfectly resisted and abhorred sin, bear the sins of the world to such a degree that he appeared as if he were sin personified.ⁱⁱⁱ Together with those sins came the punishment of being separated from God and his goodness – suffering the full force of God's righteous wrath. This was the cup of suffering that the Father handed His Son to drink.

And Jesus really did suffer – not just physically, but emotionally as well.

Our sermon text says:

In the days of his flesh, he offered prayers and pleas with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death.

This verse most certainly refers to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus said to His disciples: *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, even to the point of death."*^{iv}

The repulsiveness of sin imputed to his holy nature, and the knowledge of the great suffering he would have to endure, gave him such anguish that, as he prayed, *his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground.*^v

For what did Jesus pray? That the LORD would take his suffering away. The thought of his cross terrified him as much as the thought of hell terrifies us. Make no mistake: Jesus truly desired our salvation. In all his anguish, he did not sin. But here we see Jesus subjected to such emotional weakness that God had to send an angel to strengthen him. Here we see the Merciful One crying out for mercy.

He prayed: *"Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."*^{vi}

What effect did Jesus' prayer have on his Father? Our text says:

He was heard because of his reverence.

But how can that be when Jesus still suffered and died? What does "he was heard" mean?

It means that God answered Jesus' petition, "*not what I will, but what you will.*" God strengthened Jesus so that he could continue submitting to his Father's plan - even though the mere thought of his suffering caused him great anguish. Jesus certainly knew that his Father could change things. But that was not his heavenly Father's plan.

And when, after hours of prayer, it remained clear that it was God's will for him to drink the cup of suffering his Father ordained for him from before the world began, Jesus didn't complain or cry out, "God, why aren't you doing what I ask! Don't you love me?" No. Rather, trusting in his Father's promises, Jesus got up to face his betrayer. He resolutely went with the mob that came to arrest him to take up the cross he abhorred.

What result did Jesus' determination to carry out his Father's plan have? Our text says:

⁸ *Although he was the Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered.*

Even though Jesus is the true Son of God, He is also true man. As true God, he is eternally perfect and all-knowing. As a man, he was subject to God's law and had to learn, just like us. As our substitute, therefore, Jesus had to learn to submit to his Father's will just as we would - not by moving from disobedience to obedience like us, but by growing in his knowledge of what perfect obedience all involves as he suffered.

God's law demands perfect obedience from us. We, however, continually fail to express it. But Jesus perfectly obeyed His Father in everything - even when that meant carrying the sin he abhorred and suffering the punishment he in no way deserved. Jesus did this for us - not merely to pay for our sins, but also to offer us the perfect record of obedience we need to stand before God; a record He imputes to us through faith.

Our text continues:

⁹ *After he was brought to his goal, he became the source of eternal salvation for everyone who obeys him.*

Yes, Jesus became the source of eternal salvation for all who believe in him. Their faith will not remain hidden, but show itself by doing the things Jesus commands for our good. This obedience is not the price we pay to get salvation. It is the fruit that grows from the faith by which we already possess salvation in Christ.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, do you see how Jesus is our great, sympathetic High Priest? He willingly drank the cup of suffering his Father ordained for him to win our salvation. Because of his obedience, we are declared righteous in God's sight. Because of his cross, we stand forgiven.

Jesus knows the temptations, pressures, and anxieties we face on this earth – having faced many of them himself. He sympathizes with us in our weakness. More importantly, he can offer us the forgiveness, life, and salvation we so desperately need.

Where does Jesus offer us these blessings? He offers them to us through His Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

In a short while, we are going to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Just think of what God offers you through that special meal. He forgives your sins, strengthens your faith, and reassures you that you are his dearly loved child. Because Jesus, your sympathetic High Priest, drank the cup of God's wrath in your place, you will never have to drink it.

Why not? Because as you partake of the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, you enter into a special communion with Christ and receive his very body and blood. The bread and wine are not just symbols of your redemption; they are, at Christ's command, the means by which he gives you his very self.

Think about the love, forgiveness, and peace God offers you on the plate and in the cup of communion. These blessings are yours to receive and enjoy – all because of Christ's work for you: all because He submitted to His Father's will and drank the cup of suffering that we deserved.

Rejoice in this salvation. Respond to it out of thanks to God by willingly obeying His good and gracious will recorded in Scripture. Christ's commands are not meant to burden or harm, but to strengthen, protect, and bless you. They keep you safe on this sin-cursed earth, as Jesus himself delivers you home to himself in heaven.

Yes, rejoice in what Jesus, your sympathetic High Priest, did for you. Because he drank the cup of God's wrath to its last bitter drop, you will drink the cup of God's blessings with him both now and forever in heaven.

Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Hebrews 4:15

ⁱⁱ Isaiah 53:6 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21

^{iv} Mark 14:34 EHV

^v Luke 22:44 EHV

^{vi} Mark 14:36 EHV