**John 18:10-11** March 3, 2021

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Lenten Mid-week #3

*John 18:10Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.)*

*11Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**“Shall I not Drink the Cup the Father Has Given Me?”**

Scan-Tron. Back in the mid 1980’s Scan-Tron revolutionized test taking, at least at my high school. It made grading tests very easy for teachers. Teachers could now feed an answer card through a machine and it corrected the test in a fraction of the time it used to take teachers armed only with their wits and a red pen. We students loved it too! We loved it because Scan-Tron could only do true/false and multiple choice questions, the sort where you just fill in the circle with your #2 pencil. That meant a lot fewer short answer questions, and especially a lot fewer of the dreaded essay questions. We hated those—essay questions—do you know why? Because essay questions are difficult. They require you not just to *know* the facts, but to *understand* the facts.

This year our Lenten meditations ask questions. If you liked Scan-Tron questions, these questions will disappoint you. Our Lenten questions are not simple fact questions like, “What was Jesus crucified on?” “Who was the Roman governor?” Sure, many of the questions in this series *could* be answered with a simple “Yes” or “No.” But just try it. Answer tonight’s question with a

one world answer and you will sound like an idiot. ***“Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”*** Just try answering a simple “Yes! Yes, Jesus, you should!” Your answer will demand a further explanation. *“How can you, you miserable sinner, say that Jesus should drink that cup?”* These Lenten questions don’t ask for one word answers. When we students of the Bible hear them, we have to lean back in our desks, pencil in hand, and think about it. We have to think about the Lenten Story, think about who we are, who God is, what Jesus is doing.

Of this series of Lenten Questions, today’s most directly asks what this whole Lent thing is about. And yet, it is far from a direct question. In fact, with today’s question you might even wonder what the question is asking!

Every profession has its own lingo. Listen to two army retirees reminisce about old times and you will hear a whole dictionary of stuff that’s not in the dictionary: AO, PSC, BCT, and the lot. Lie in a hospital bed and listen to two nurses talk about your care and medication and you will wonder if they are speaking English. It can happen with pastors. Sometimes pastors get up here preaching in the pulpit or even reading from the Bible and we start talking a language that, sure, pastors understand, but the people in the pew—they have day jobs! They don’t have time for that. I wonder if most people understand what Jesus asks in the question, ***“Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”***

What is this about a cup? The way Jesus uses the word “cup” here is not how we ever use the word in our day to day lives. This goes back to an Old Testament picture frequently used, especially by the prophets.

The picture is of God as the master of a banquet. God has invited people. He has been patient. He has forgiving. He has called. He has corrected. But the people just don’t seem to get it. Actually, it’s not that they don’t get it. They do get it. But they refuse to live like he is God, or to thank him for what he has done. Finally, God says that the time is up. Like a judge who has seen a man in his courtroom one too many times, he is going to throw the book at them, and actually, worse. Now God takes up a cup of doom and says that people will drink it. Psalm 75 gives you a taste of what this question about “drinking the cup” means: *“It is God who judges… In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs” (7-8).*

God will force them to drink, to drink his judgment upon them. No one wants to drink from this cup. As he brings the cup near, they look in at the wine, but they know it is not just wine. The cup touches their lip and they feel the death sentence soon to be executed. Elsewhere God tells one of his prophets, *“Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them”* (Jer. 25:15). This is not an angry God having a temper tantrum. This is a righteous God responding to stubborn, disobedient people. It is divine, eternal judgment.

This picture makes us uneasy: an angry God forcing people to drink from a poisoned cup. But it is in this context that we must understand the question that Jesus asks this evening. Jesus stands in the Garden of Gethsemane bathed in the silvery moonlight surrounded by soldiers, disciples, chief priests and rabble. He asks this question on the eve of his death: ***“Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”***

This “cup” is not simply that Jesus will die. Much more, he is going to take upon himself God’s righteous punishment of sin. It is the cup of eternal suffering that each and every one of us ought to drink of for eternity for our sins of thought, word and deed. It is the cup that should bring untold misery to you and to me. And Jesus says, ***“Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”***

There are times in our lives where people help us, but only grudgingly. A father tells his son to regularly check the oil. The child doesn’t. He won’t. “There goes dad again!” he thinks. But now as the smoking car sits by the side of the road, the child now is in quite a pickle. Eventually dad shows up with a tow truck to help. But dad lets son know that he is not happy about helping him. The child feels about 2 inches tall. Dad is angry, he is fed up and knows he shouldn’t even step in, but he can’t help it, and so the child is saved—but made to know how wrong he was.

Jesus’ question tells us that is NOT what Jesus is doing here. Jesus is not angrily stepping to our aid—though he would have every right to be angry. No, he willingly takes the cup. In desperation, one of his followers had drawn *and wielded* his sword in the presence of trained soldiers. Jesus had brought a halt to it. In this moment Jesus declared that if he wanted, at this very moment, he could call in six divions of angelic infantry—or are they cavalry, or air? He had just knocked to the ground the entire detachment come to arrest him simply by saying, *“I am he.”* Jesus didn’t have to drink this cup. It was ours, not his. He could have stepped out at any point. And in fact, he had just prayed for this very thing. Minutes before this he had prayed, *“Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will”* (Mk 14:36).

And now, after he has established his power and righteous in this little Garden outside the walls of Jerusalem, he also establishes his willingness. Jesus says, ***“Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”*** Yes, he will. It will be great pain. It will be the divine judgment owed by a guilty humanity. But the cup of the Lord’s wrath will be willingly drunk by Jesus.

Marvel at this question. Marvel at what he drinks. Marvel at how willingly he takes it in our place. Amen.