Going for the Cup **John 18:1-14**
Trinity CRC, April 6, 2025 Rev. Richard J. deLange
John Series – Lent

Hear the Word of our Lord from John 18:1-14

1 When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron
Valley. On the other side there was a garden (or olive grove in your pew Bibles), and he
and his disciples went into it.
2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there
with his disciples. 3 So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and
some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches,
lanterns and weapons.
4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is
it you want?"
5 "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.
"I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) 6 When
Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.
7 Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?"
"Jesus of Nazareth," they said.
8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men
go." 9 This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost
one of those you gave me."
10 Then 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.)
11 Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father
has given me?"
12 Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested
Jesus. They bound him 13 and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of
Caiaphas, the high priest that year. 14 Caiaphas was the one who had advised the
Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Beloved of God,

"Going for the cup" is a phrase we might associate with our Edmonton Oilers vying for the Stanley Cup. The anticipation is growing for that as we get closer to the start of the playoffs. In many sports, athletes "go for the cup", their grand prize, their gold medal, their blue ribbon. If you play sports or watch them, you're familiar with going for the top prize. In the business world, you might go for the top floor of the skyscraper. The corner office with glass on two sides—whatever the spot for the top honcho. Our society is built around people striving to get ahead and win.

But when Jesus goes for the cup, it's a much different picture. It's not a picture of glory but of shame and suffering. It's not about self-advancement but self-consecration to the Father's will, to self-sacrifice and service. It's about punishment, hatred, spite,

rejection, betrayal and denial. His cup is a hard journey of suffering to bear the weight of our sin and the wrath of God against it in order **for us** to attain victory.

John 17 records the prayer of Jesus but it's only one part of his prayers that evening in the garden. We read in the other gospels like Matthew 26 how Jesus,

> Mt 26:39 *… fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*

The cup refers to a symbol of God's judgment. In Psalm 75:8, the psalmist says,

> Ps 75:8 *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.*

Then Isaiah 51 calls it the cup of God's wrath.

The cup of God's wrath against the sin of the world is what Jesus is talking about. But we need to recognize that only a short time ago, Jesus was praying, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me." The cup that he doesn't want to drink is the cup poured out by the Father on all the wickedness and ungodliness of humanity. Jesus didn't want to drink that cup. That's why he prayed because it was a fierce and bitter cup.

Theologian Sinclair Ferguson said, "in our humanity, it was not simply that Jesus didn't want to, but it was that Jesus *couldn't* want to drink that cup. He *couldn't* want to. It was not his desire to enter into the outer darkness, to face the reality of godforsakenness — i.e., to face the experience that was about to be his on the cross: the spiritual agony of bearing the sins of the world in divine judgment."

But between that prayer and the events of John 18, something changed. Jesus did end up going for that cup. So, let's think about that cup some more this morning.

Won without Human Weapons

I invite you to consider, first of all, this is a cup our beloved Lord Jesus won without human weapons. Remember, Jesus says to Peter, "Put away your sword." The whole scene in the opening of John 18 is human power out to put Jesus down. There's an angry and spiteful group looking for blood:

> Jn 18:3 *…Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.*

Jesus does not meet force with force. His kingdom is not of this world. He does not fight as the world does. He does not even need human reinforcements. Judas stands before him as a betrayer. And when Peter uses the sword to defend his master, Jesus rebukes him and says in effect, "We don't need that!" And then a short time later, Peter's bravery turns to cowardice as he will deny Jesus and the other disciples will simply disappear, leaving Jesus to face the prosecutors alone.

How will Jesus win the cup? The thing to recognize is that Jesus has been in communion with the Father. I mentioned already that he's just finished praying for himself, the disciples and the church in John 17. We know Jesus has agonized in prayer for the cup to be removed.

And now it appears that prayer has been answered and Jesus is now ready to go for the cup. The struggle in Gethsemane is over. Jesus no longer prays for the cup of bitter suffering and death on the cross to pass. He is now fully determined to drink this terrible cup which the Father has given him. It is not a cup which the Father has forced on him. This is a cup which he and the Father and Spirit long ago agreed needed to be drunk. Having, then, prayed for strength to face it, our Good Shepherd must lay down his life for the sheep. Jesus now voluntarily offers himself as a sacrifice for our sin. Armed with strength by the Father and the Spirit through his prayer, he now is ready to willingly pursue the cup, despite knowing how hard it will be. He will not turn back and he won't fight back!

If we read through the account of Jesus' arrest and trial, we see one miscarriage of justice after another. Jesus' innocence stands out. Moreover, not a single person rises to defend him! Not one! No one had the nerve to speak out against the injustice being done against our Lord. And, as one author put it, "Not even Jesus tried to defend himself. (In fact, even) God the Father said not a word." No one comes to Jesus' defence. And that's because Jesus himself knows that the words Caiaphas said are true. But they are true on a level that Caiaphas and the other Jewish leaders of the day never understood. Caiaphas said, according to v.14, *it would be good if one man died for the people.* Jesus knew this and he would accomplish this without human weapons or human help.

Won with Deliberate Steps

Next, then, we must see that Jesus wins the cup with deliberate steps. The chapter begins with Jesus moving toward the cross. Having found strength through prayer, Jesus moves ahead with his task very intentionally. V.1 says,

> *Jn 18:1 When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it.*

This Kidron Valley was referred to by Jeremiah as a place of dead bodies and ashes. Kidron means dark or murky. Jesus intentionally moves into this space knowing that deeper and deepest darkness awaits him.

V.4 reminds us as well that Jesus steps forward; he moved willingly toward the cup. He knew what faced him. We read,

> *Jn 18:4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it your want?"*

There are no surprises awaiting him. He's fully aware that this day was coming and has now arrived. And he's ready and willing to enter this place of darkness for us. Moreover, his action also signifies his saving heart as he steps forward when Judas and the detachment of soldiers come. Where v.4 says, "he went out" it means he moved toward them, creating a little space between himself and the disciples. Protecting them.

Later Jesus speaks to them again:

Jn 18:8 *"I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." "If you seek me, let these men go."*

So here he is, the Shepherd, who stands between the wolves and the sheep. He is the Good Shepherd. He is going to give his life for the sheep. Jesus, the light of the world, stands before those who, in their darkness, have come with torches and lanterns. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness is not going to extinguish it. This is a wonderful little picture of what is true throughout the whole Bible concerning substitution: that Jesus is the one who dies in the place of sinners. What happens here anticipates all that is about to unfold. "Take me, and let them go. Take my life in order that they might have life."

Jesus has been telling his disciples that he must suffer and die, though they refused to believe him. And here he insists in v.11,

Jn 18:11b *"Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"*

He is heaven-bent on doing his Father's will and he's doing so willingly.

The first Adam found himself in the garden of Eden where the serpent took the initiative to attack God's good creatures. Now Jesus, the second Adam, finds himself in another garden where Satan once again is seeking to destroy God's good plan, but this time it's the plan to save the world. Jesus is now on the offensive, taking the initiative in this conflict with the Prince of Evil. In the other gospels, we learn that Jesus set his face as flint toward Jerusalem which means he is single-mindedly determined to do the will of the Father. He is set on rescuing the world that fell into bondage through the sin of the first Adam. He will lay down his life for the sheep. Or as John writes in v.9,

Jn 18:9 *This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."*

This is the deliberate aim of Jesus. Jesus has offered to give his life for the redemption of the sheep. He's not coerced by the Father. Rather, from eternity he is one with the Father and the Spirit. And, though as a man it is terrifyingly difficult for him to drink this cup, he is willing to do it. He wants to do it because it must be done. God the Son comes to us to satisfy the just requirements against our sin. Hallelujah, what a Saviour! Hallelujah, what a wonderful salvation!

Jesus takes deliberate steps toward the cross because no one else can save us from our sin.

John heightens the deliberateness of Jesus' action by reminding us of his name. This would further aggravate the Jewish leaders who so often accused Jesus of blasphemy for claiming he was God.

Three times in a few verses John says that Jesus calls himself *I am*. It's not as apparent in the English as in the Greek. Three times we read in our English Bible that Jesus said, "I am he." But it's the same word he uses when he says, "I am the Good Shepherd," "I am the Bread of Life", "I am the Vine" – all seven of his I am statements.

And they all harken back to God telling Moses, *I am who I am.* This is Jesus reminding the people that he is God. He is "I am." *Ego Eimi* in the Greek. Yes, he could simply be answering the question the mob asked him: "I'm the guy you're looking for." But given all that John has done with the I am statements, it seems nearly certain that he is reminding us of the divinity of Jesus. In fact, repeating it three times for emphasis. We can hear in those words, Jesus saying I am the One who will deliver my people from bondage to sin even as the "I am" delivered Israel from 400 years of bondage in Egypt.

Won for Us

Now, how do we respond to this amazing love of Jesus which willingly places himself on the road of suffering? We should see that he is doing this for us!

Or will we simply be shocked but not convicted? We ought to be somewhat surprised or at least curious about one amazing detail in this story. When Jesus first says, "Ego eimi", what do we read in v.6?

Jn 18:6 When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

Did you catch that? The mob *drew back and fell to the ground*. The Roman soldiers, the Jewish leaders and their whole mob. All he did was say "Ego eimi". He didn't scare them or shout "Bo!!" Something is going on here. As Allistar Begg says,

> It's interesting that John reminds us in this context that "Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them." I wonder: Did Judas fall to the ground as well? Or did he stand there while everybody else fell to the ground?
>
> Now, we must keep in mind **in** all of this, again, that Jesus is alert to all that's going on. Jesus …is in control here. And the drama is surely significant. I don't know how many soldiers there were, because we're not told, but it's a crowd of people, led by Judas, with their weapons, with their torches, with their lanterns, and they have all now fallen to the ground.
>
> …they "fell to the ground." And Jesus said to them again, "Who is it that you seek?" Surely this is an encounter with divinity. This is terror. This is awe. This is mystery. This is majesty. A contingent of Roman soldiers, armed and trained, fall to the ground before the carpenter's son, fall to the ground before an unarmed prophet.

Something amazing has happened. Are you amazed?

To me, I wonder if this foreshadows the day Paul speaks of in Philippians 2 when he shows how Jesus humbled himself, took on the form of a servant—as he is doing here in John 18. And Paul says,

Php 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

That's a day when many will worship the Lord as they have before. But others will be too late; they will still fall down and worship, confessing Jesus as Lord, though all of their life they rejected him. Those who truly believed will join the throng depicted in Revelation 5 who fall down and worship. We read that when they saw the Lord Jesus as the Lamb looking as though it had been slain, "the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb." They fall in praise. They fall in adoration. They fall in exultation. They fall before the One who loves them and who they love and adore.

These people here in John 18 fall down in some miraculous way when Jesus says, "Ego eimi." They are confronted by the power of the name of Jesus, by the presence of God in Christ. For a moment, they are somehow brought to their knees in awe. But then they get up again and continue with their arrest of this innocent man. They have had a small taste of the majesty of Jesus but have still rejected him.

That's a humbling reminder to us all that Jesus is worthy of all our praise every day. We must not just see his sacrificial love once and then resume our life. No, we must stand in awe of him daily. We must be worshipful people. People who not only come to worship on Sundays to adore him. That is, of course, important and formative. We need this. But we leave from here each week to continue to adore him in our daily lives. We offer our lives as a sacrifice of praise to him. We serve others as he has served us. We do our construction, our farming, our nursing, our teaching, our parenting and studies and everything else to the glory and praise of Jesus. In it all and through it all, we give praise to the One who freed us from our sin. We bow down before the One who gives us new life, helps us to live more selflessly, more self-sacrificially as he did, who helps us make our lives a blessing to others.

Friends, our Lord Jesus chased after the cup of suffering for us. He won the cup of salvation for us. He defeated sin for us so that we can truly live. Let us do so. Live out of his victory and live by his grace every day, letting everyone see in our lives what a difference Jesus has made. May our lives show that we fall down in adoration for his salvation. Let us give him all the praise with our lips and our whole lives every day.

Amen