

† April 2014 †

(I)

Absalom had betrayed his father, King David, and stolen the heart of the people against him. He made it his habit to stand outside the gate where people would come when they had a legal case for the king to judge. He would tell them that the king would not make time for them, but that he would. He acted kind and generous over his father's subjects in order that they might prefer him over their king. He thought he would make a better king, so he committed treason.

His name means, *Father of Peace*. But he did not honor his name, because he did not honor his father. He did not have peaceful intentions. He sought to wrest from God's anointed the throne that God had given him. He went to war with his own father. David did not want war with his son. He loved his son very much. He wanted peace. He would rather see his son take from him everything he had than to see his son come to harm, or much less that he would hang for his treachery.

So David fled. Many followed him, but most stayed. The rightful king of Israel became an outcast, rejected by his own. But would *God* reject him too? David would leave that to God. The rightful throne was in Jerusalem. David knew this. It was God's kingdom on earth, where the Tabernacle was, where God met His people in mercy, where the Ark of the Covenant stood in the Holy of holies. And it was there alone where God would rule His people through His chosen king. In order to confess this truth, David refused to bring the Ark with him. If God wanted to keep him as king, God would do so:

"If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, He will bring me back and show me both [the Ark of God] and His dwelling place. But if He says thus: 'I have no delight in you,' here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him."
(2 Samuel 15:25-26)

With such trust that God would judge righteously, David then crossed over the Brook Kidron (or Kedron) into the wilderness to escape.

While across the brook, David went up by way of the Mount of Olives, and wept bitterly as he went up, his head covered, and his feet bare. And all the people who were with him likewise covered their heads and wept with their king.

A thousand years later, David's Son, whom God promised would establish his throne forever in mercy (2 Samuel 7:12-16), also fled across the Brook Kidron. He was also being rejected by His own. He also would rather lose everything that He had than see His rebellious children suffer for their treachery. That is why He crossed Kedron into the Mount of Olives as His earthly father once did before Him. And there, like David, Jesus wept (John 18:1-2, Matthew 26:36-46). But unlike David, surrounded by his few faithful friends, Jesus was alone. No one wept with Him. They slept. No one prayed with Him. His disciples didn't see the danger. Jesus faced it by Himself.

(II)

As it turned out, Absalom lost. While escaping David's loyal servants through the forest, his glorious head of hair was caught on a tree limb. His haughtiness and pride became his own snare. He swung, helpless, hanging for his crime, until he was cut down and killed. David wept even more bitterly than he had before: "*O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!*" (2 Samuel 18:33). What love! What mercy! The kind that can forgive so thoroughly and graciously. David was truly taught by God.

After the death of Absalom, though victory had been gained, David mourned. He then reassumed his throne and gained all power again to himself. God was with him. David had God's favor and delight, and so God did for him what seemed good in His sight. He answered the prayer David prayed in Psalm 3, which he prayed when these events were taking place:

"But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my head. I cried to the LORD with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill." (Psalm 3:3-4)

God was gracious and faithful to David for the sake of Christ his promised Seed. He kept the promise once given, that He would establish his throne forever. But the throne He promised to bless was not one that would be wrested by violence as with Absalom. It would be founded in mercy by the true Prince of Peace. It was a spiritual throne that would be claimed by none other than David's greater Son and David's gracious Lord.

Just like David, Jesus was rejected by His own and even betrayed. But He did not flee. He did not give up His kingdom. He went to the Mount of Olives to claim it. He wept bitterly because He knew the cost. He knew what His Father delighted in. He knew what must be done in order to make peace with His rebellious people. He crossed Kedron and prayed that if it be his Father's will He might not have to endure the wrath our sin deserved. "*Nonetheless, not My will, but Yours be done.*" He prayed as David did: "*Do to Me as seems good to You.*" God's will was done. Jesus got what David had wished for. He died in our place in order to make us children of God and joint heirs of His kingdom.

Absalom's gorgeous hair got him caught in a tree. It was his ruin as he sought to seize his father's crown. But the glory of Christ's sacred head was not found in the beauty of His hair or in any comely appearance. Christ's glory was found in the wounds He endured for us as He hung condemned on the tree of the cross. He wore a crown of thorns in order that He might share His kingdom with those for whose treachery He suffered and died. The authority of His kingdom Jesus did not wrest from His Father. No, He earned it. His Father gave His Son the right to rule us as His children through the forgiveness of our sins.

(III)

Especially during Lent, we take time to ponder these events of our salvation. King David serves as a type of Christ (that is, an Old Testament picture of what God had been promising all along), and so the similarities of the events surrounding their lives are wonderful (and intentionally arranged by God). But the differences are even better! David was only a type – a shadow. Christ is the substance of everything God's saints have hoped for. I pray that the following hymn (*Over Kedron Jesus Trader*), written in 1699 by the great Danish hymnist, Thomas Kingo, may serve as a guide in your meditation of the holy mystery of our

Lord's passion. Though He wept alone at Olivet, may we learn to weep tears of both repentance and joy through the grace that His tears teach us. And so may we also watch and pray with our Lord.

1 Over Kedron Jesus treadeth
To His passion for us all;
Every human eye be weeping,
Tears of bitter grief let fall!
Round His spirit flock the foes,
Place their shafts and bend their bows,
Aiming at the Savior solely,
While the world forsakes Him wholly.

2 David once, with heart afflicted,
Crossed the Kedron's narrow strand,
Clouds of gloom and grief about him
When an exile from his land.
But, O Jesus, blacker now
Bends the cloud above Thy brow,
Hasting to death's dreary portals
For the shame and sin of mortals.

3 Wilt Thou in Thy pain and ruing
To the Mount of Olives go?
Yet there is no tree for viewing
Where the fruits of peace may grow;
War and battle, bitter pain,
Death and mockery and shame
Every bud shoots forth with sorrow
Jesus now no peace can borrow.

Here an allusion is being made to the Garden of Eden, and it will be built upon later as well (Genesis 2-3). Adam and Eve walked with God in the cool of the evening eating whatever fruit refreshed them. And in the midst was not only the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but also the tree of life. Adam's disobedience brought a curse upon all mankind, necessitating God's plan of redemption. It also cut them off from the tree of life, the tree of peace. Our sin cut us off from God. That is why upon entering the Mount of Olives, Jesus sees how starkly dissimilar this garden is from the paradise in which He once walked with Adam. In order for this garden, Gethsemane, to give life as Eden once did, Jesus must give His own, taking the curse upon Himself. And by doing so, Jesus reopened the paradise that was closed to our first parents. Eden is now open again to us through the blood of Christ.

4 Enter now the restful garden
As a peaceful quiet space,
Sorrow soon begins to darken,

Follow Thee in every place!
Come now, Adam, come and see
Enter blest Gethsemane!
See the Lord of heaven shaking
Hellish anguish for us taking.

(IV)

Jesus is the second Adam. God became Man. He takes the curse upon Himself and so tastes what Adam was spared.

5 All of Jesus' limbs are quaking
As sins' burden hard doth press
See the God-Man ever shaking
Death doth bring to life distress
Jesus' lifeblood forth doth pour
And His heart aches more and more
Shooting forth with blood-streams narrow
From ten thousand poisoned arrows.

6 See how, anguish-struck, He falleth
Prostrate, and with struggling breath,
Three times on His God He calleth,
Praying that the bitter death
And the cup of doom may go,
Still He cries, in all His woe:
"Not My will, but Thine, O Father!"
And the angels round Him gather.

7 See how, in that hour of darkness,
Battling with the evil power,
Agonies untold assail Him,
On His soul the arrows shower;
All the garden flowers are wet
With the drops of bloody sweat,
From His anguished frame distilling –
World's redemption thus fulfilling!

In the Garden of Eden, Paradise was fed and sustained by four rivers. And mist rose from the earth. But these rivers were now dried up. And the earth was now cursed. But here the Son of God-become-Man stood sweating and weeping. The poet here is drawing a beautiful connection. Though the earth could bring forth nothing but thorns and thistles, the dew of Christ's bloody sweat, as He wrestled with the redemption price He would soon be paying, now covered all that grew in the garden.

It even covered the most beautiful flowers. It covered everything like the mist of Eden once did. By Jesus' passion, sin's curse was being destroyed forever.

It was *God's* curse, remember. The arrows that pierced Him are the arrows of *God*. As David says in his Psalm as from Jesus' perspective:

O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure! For Your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down. (Psalm 38:1-2)

Jesus bore God's wrath against sin – our sin – David's sin – Absalom's sin – Adam's sin and the sin of all his children. Jesus bore the wrath of God against all sinners and against all of us Christians who fail to honor the name we have received in Baptism.

What pained Jesus was not just that Absalom's treachery and Adam's disobedience offended Him (though it did!). What pained Him was that it offended God His Father, and God His Father took it all out on Him. He became the sacrificial Lamb who would bear the world's sin. To bear this burden for us, Jesus would need to be strengthened in the weakness of His human nature. Angels came to serve Him as He shed His first drops of blood. Just like the angels of gold brooded over the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of holies in the Temple where the sacrificial blood was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat, so angels came to Jesus here where He was pouring Himself out as a drink offering to God.

8 O ye heavens, will ye give Him
Strength of heart, and that right soon?
To the end He hard has striven
Jesus dies! He dies so soon!
Holy angels, come and see
Strengthen Him for death to see!
How His cheeks are filled with pallor,
As He meets His death with valor.

9 See the blood so sadly dripping
With each drop of sweat so cold;
Death in every vein is seeping
And His face is dark as coal;
And the grass where Jesus prays
Now a bloody carpet stays
From His precious veins now offering,
See what pains He now is suffering!

(V)

We long to see what angels look into (1 Peter 1:12). We behold and ponder Christ's agony for us in order to see the price that God was willing to pay for us. We see not only the measure of God's love.

We see also the result of God's love. He suffers and dies for the salvation of our souls. Nothing on earth can afford us such gladness as Jesus' atoning death for us.

10 Daily I am gladly yearning
E'er to go to Kedron's stream
And from earthly pleasure turning
In a penitential theme!
Daily in Gethsemane
With my spirit I shall see
Jesus' bleeding and His sighing
For my soul is all His dying.

11 Now, away with earthly pleasure!
Let me see my Jesus dear!
In Gethsemane, my Treasure,
I will gather me a tear
From His bloody sweat of pain
Which my righteousness did gain
Earth now gives me only sadness
Till I enter heaven's gladness.

12 But, O flowers, so sadly watered
By this pure and precious dew,
In some blessed hour your blossoms
'Neath the olive-shadows grew!
Eden's garden did not bear
Aught that can with you compare,
For the blood, thus freely given,
Makes my soul the heir of heaven.

What a treasure it is to ponder what Christ has done for us! But what an even greater treasure it is to receive the fruit of His Passion in His Gospel and Sacraments. What we receive from Jesus the Crucified is eternal life from Jesus the Resurrected. His death gives us life because it paid for our sin. His life gives us hope for eternal life, because we have been joined to Him by water and the word in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That is why we gather in this name. When Jesus deals with us in the Divine Service, He always deals with us as the One who has earned for us entrance into heaven. He gives us access into the grace in which we stand (Romans 5:1). May this access to God give us joy in the midst of all afflictions, and even in the hour of death.

13 When as flowers themselves I wither,
When I droop and fade like grass,
When the life-streams through my pulses
Dull and ever duller pass,
When at last they cease to roll,

Then, to cheer my sinking soul,
Grace of Jesus, be Thou given –
Source of triumph! Pledge of heaven!

14 And now when my heart is breaking,
And my eye no longer sees,
When my tongue no sound is making,
Let my soul a droplet seize
Of Thy precious sweat and blood;
Wash my heart in that dear flood.
In the hour when I am dying,
On Thy Passion I'm relying.

We celebrate Lent in order to prepare for the celebration of Jesus' resurrection. And by teaching us to repent of our sin and believe in His mercy for Christ's sake, God teaches us also to prepare for our own resurrection. God grant this to us all!

† Amen †

Soli Deo Gloria