

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Good Friday – March 29, 2024
John 18:1-19:42 – Blood and Water
Rev Peter Wagner

In the name of Jesus, our crucified Lord. Amen.

It is finished. Our God is dead. His work is complete. His lifeblood is poured out. Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. The debt of sin is paid. There he lies, the Lamb of God, slaughtered for all the sins of the world. It is finished, nothing more is needed. The full price is offered, and infinitely more.

And now, at the climax of all history, at the moment when God completes his saving work, he bows his head and gives up his spirit. His spirit is the Holy Spirit. The Son of God gives the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. He pours his Spirit over all the earth, to comfort stricken sinners. To comfort all who are crushed in darkness, in terror of the consequence of sin.

Now the Holy Spirit will gather all nations to this Savior, to his cross. Here at the cross, he will give them the precious blood and water, the forgiveness he has won. It is finished. The sacrifice is paid. Now let us draw near to his throne of grace to receive his gifts.

Tonight, in our meditation on the passion of our Lord, let us focus on one specific detail of John's gospel. Right after our Lord bows his head, right after he gives up his spirit, John adds one thing. To ensure that Jesus was dead, a Roman soldier pierced his side with a spear, so that blood and water came out.

Blood and water has a medical explanation. On the cross, our Lord's body likely went into shock due to blood loss. Then just before death, this shock led to a rapid heart rate and caused fluid to gather in the membrane around his lungs and heart. So the spear pierced the membrane, and blood and water came out.

But why does John emphasize the blood and water? Why confirm it with an oath? Listen again.

When they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness – his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth – that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

John stresses this blood and water to show that his testimony is true, in every detail. To show that his testimony of Jesus' death fulfilled all that the prophets had spoken. That none of his bones were broken, that he was pierced for our transgressions.

But John's emphasis on the blood and water is not merely medical, but theological. Therefore John repeats himself again in his first epistle. "This is he who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree."

The Spirit that he breathed out, and the water and blood that flowed from his side. This is the centerpiece, the climax of everything John wrote. It's heart of his gospel. Blood and water, through the Spirit. In these three you have life.

The blood is the blood of the cup, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. You drink it in communion. The water is the water of life, poured in the name of the crucified Son, over you in baptism. You were washed in his name, and you are washed as often as you repent and are forgiven.

But this water and blood do not operate alone. Both have their power by the Holy Spirit, and the word of his testimony. And all three are yours in the church, where Christ is with you in his blood, where he forgives you through the washing of renewal and rebirth in the Holy Spirit, poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.

So John's gospel overflows with water and blood, the gifts of the sacraments in the Holy Spirit.

From the first day of Jesus' ministry, from his baptism in the Jordan with water. From the joyous wedding at Cana, when he changed water into wine, like the blood of communion. From the night he taught Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." From the day he told the woman at the well, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." And from the day he told his disciples, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his

blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” And from the time he stood up during the feast of booths and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” From all this, the Holy Spirit brings us to the water and blood that flowed from his side.

This is the central message of the gospel. The central reason for the death of Christ. The central means by which God gives you forgiveness, purchased on the cross.

So purge me with hyssop, Lord Jesus. The hyssop branch that was raised to your lips, with a sponge filled with sour wine. “Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Wash me, Lord Jesus, in the font of baptism. Bring me to your cross and forgive my sins by the water that poured from your side.

And sprinkle me with your blood, dear Redeemer, the blood that makes atonement by the life. Give me your cup to drink. Bring me to your cross and atone me by the blood that poured from your side.

O Lamb of God, you lie slain on the altar, you lie dead in the tomb. You took my death and made it yours. You took your life and gave it to me. I thank you, dear Jesus, for your death. For pouring out your Spirit. For pouring out your cleansing water, and your atoning blood. It is finished, so now I may come to your throne of grace. Amen.