

Staring Down Death

In Gethsemane

- We need go somewhere tog tonight. I want you come with me to Gethsemane, to the garden – close eyes, pretend there – dark out, except for moonlight shining through olive branches; quiet, except for hum of city activity in nearby Jerusalem; chill in air, slight breeze; discs over there, about fall asleep; Jesus right here, praying. On knees, up against large rock, with arms spread out, head bowed down. His heart racing, hands shaking; sweating; think he's crying, bec staring down death (SDD).
- And he's got song stuck in head. About hour ago, finishing up Passover in Upper Room. Every year at Passover, you always sang Ps 113-118; they called it "Passover Hallel." You'd sing Ps 113-114 before meal; when meal's done, sing Ps 115-118. So that's what Jesus did about hour ago; and he still has stuck in head: melody, words of Ps 116, words which paradoxically must have terrified Jesus, at same time strengthened him, as he was SDD.

Staring Down Death

- **Vs. 1-2a.** Listen: "**Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will**" (Mk 14:36). Then hears Peter snore; realizes: 'Now I'm all alone. I have no one, except Lord.' When you feel all alone, like have no one except Lord, remem: at least you do have Lord. Tomorrow, Jesus: "**My God...forsaken me?!**" (Mk 15:34); God will not **vs. 1b** or **2a** – that's hell on cross. But because of cross, you will never be all alone; Lord will always hear your prayer.
- By now knot in Jesus' stomach getting tighter, feeling nauseous, bec remembers, **vs. 3.** Must have been like terrifying, R-rated horror film flashing through Jesus' mind; like tentacles of octopus – "**cords of death**" – wrapping around body, pulling down into deep, dark cavern; cavern entrance is closing – "**anguish of grave coming over him.**" Jesus must have just been terrified, not in sinful, God-doubting way, but just scared to death, bec knew what was coming: nails driven through hands, feet; whips ripping skin off back; crucifixion. Chokes me up to think about it. Jesus was scared; SDD.
- Are you scared bec you're SDD? Some you have been diagnosed with disease that means you are SDD. Some you have had brush with death in past, like car accident or heart attack, where you were SDD. Some you have family member SDD, someone you love. And some you have just recently been to funeral for someone who was SDD. And sometimes reality of death just hits you hard, and all of sudden; and it's terrifying. Death not natural; we were not created to die; death is result of curse of sin, which we all bear; and we cannot escape death. Fact is: we are all SDD.
- How deal with that, face that reality? Well, how did Jesus, that night in Gethsemane? Remembered **vs. 5.** And Jesus: 'That's me. I'm doing this for my people, people I love, created, to save them from death, bec I am "**gracious, righteous, full of compassion.**" 'And so is my Father, and I know,' **vs. 6b.** So, in next few hours, when the darkest of evil brings me low, and I must bear awful punishment for human sin, I know my God will save me.' And now sweat dropping like blood; can hardly catch breath. **Vs. 7-9.** Even when Jesus was SDD, he trusted that God would raise him to life, deliver him from death, so that he could walk in land living. Yes, first Jesus must die; but then the res; and Jesus will live again! And so it is with us: yes, first we must die; but then the res; and we will live again! Jesus: "**Because I live, you too shall live**" (Jn 14:19). And Ps 116: **vs. 15** – precious, because from God's perspective, another child comes home heaven, never has to SDD ever again. You are precious to Jesus: your live, your death, your eternal life. And that's why Jesus SDD: so that you could go heaven. Yes, the "**cords of death**" are terrifying; Jesus knows that! But when you're confronted with reality of death, you can face it like Jesus did, confident that you will **vs. 9.** That's how you SDD.

Thanking Jesus

- And, that's also how you live your life. You live differently when know you've been rescued from hell, and when you die going heaven. Ps asks, **vs. 12**. Can't repay God; but can thank! One way to thank: worship him. 4x in Ps, talks re calling on Lord's name – phrase that means worshipping Lord. **Vs. 2b, 4a, 13b, 17**. To call on name Lord = worship him, with thankful heart.
- Another way thank Lord: this Ps talks re fulfilling your vows. **Vs. 14 says**; vs. 18 says same thing. Remem day of Luth conf? On that day, you made vow to Lord, that you would: remain faithful to Jesus for rest life; come to church regularly to hear word, receive sacrament; and live godly, Christian life. That was your vow. So **vs. 14**. I want dedicate my life to Jesus, bec he gave life for me.
- Finally, another way to thank Lord: **vs. 13a**. What is CS? It's a poetic way of talking re gospel; chalice filled with God's love, everything he's done to save me. So when I lift up CS, I'm praising God for grace; I'm thanking him, believing in him, proclaiming his gospel to others.
- And that phrase (CS) is very reminiscent of cup of wine used in Passover meal, sacred meal for OT Jews that celebrated God saving his people from slavery. So, therefore, also reminiscent of cup of wine used in Lord's Supper, sacred meal for NT Christians that celebrates God saving his people from slavery to sin. So when we lift up cup of HC, which our Savior gave to us this very night as remembrance of his death and for forgiveness of our sins – his true body/blood given/shed for us on cross – when we lift up this CS and receive this sacrament in humble faith, God is putting his gospel into our bodies and into our souls, and he is preparing us, strengthening us for day when we must SDD.

No Fear in Death

- You know: tonight certainly re Jesus instituting HC. But also beginning of Christ's passion. So now time for us to leave Geth. Time for Jesus to rise from prayer, and for disciples to wake up. Arresting officers are on their way; and Jesus is SDD. But doing it for you, so that someday when you are SDD, you won't have to fear **vs. 3ab**, because **vs. 15**. When you're SDD, remember: Jesus died, and he rose, and now he lives forever, so that when you die, you will rise and live with him forever. Thank you, Jesus! **Vs. 8-9**.

Psalm 116

¹ I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. ² Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.

³ The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came over me; I was overcome by distress and sorrow. ⁴ Then I called on the name of the LORD: "LORD, save me!"

⁵ The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. ⁶ The LORD protects the unwary; when I was brought low, he saved me. ⁷ Return to your rest, my soul, for the LORD has been good to you.

⁸ For you, LORD, have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, ⁹ that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living. ¹⁰ I trusted in the LORD when I said, "I am greatly afflicted"; ¹¹ in my alarm I said, "Everyone is a liar."

¹² What shall I return to the LORD for all his goodness to me? ¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. ¹⁴ I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.

¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful servants. ¹⁶ Truly I am your servant, LORD; I serve you just as my mother did; you have freed me from my chains. ¹⁷ I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD. ¹⁸ I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people, ¹⁹ in the courts of the house of the LORD— in your midst, Jerusalem. Praise the LORD.