

Ash Wednesday/Midweek 1
Names of Wondrous Love—JESUS
Text: Luke 22:39-46

What's your favorite name for the Savior? Chances are it's Jesus. That's what we first learned to call him as little ones. "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," we sang. As the years advance, it's still the name that we treasure. "Jesus, lead us on till our rest is won," we sing with feeling (CW 422).

Why is the name of Jesus so precious to us? First of all, it is a name given from heaven. Not doting parents, but God himself picked this name. Nine months before the Savior's birth, it was given to his mother and then later also to his foster father. "Give him the name Jesus," the angel messenger from heaven told them. Second, it's because this name fits. Does anyone here not know that Jesus means "Savior" or "helper"? One short name of only five letters, but in it God's plan of salvation is simply described.

And best of all, we associate God's wondrous love for sinners with this name. How can we use or hear the name Jesus without marveling at the divine love behind our salvation? This year in our Lenten services we're going to look at some of the names of our Savior and the wondrous love linked with them. Where else would we start but with the well-known

Name of Wondrous Love—JESUS
I. Jesus' love for a fallen world
II. Jesus' love for his Father's will

I.

Note what name is used for our Savior that night in the Garden of Gethsemane. That's Jesus our Savior, Jesus our Helper. What brought him there? What's he doing there? Well, let's see. Come with me now into the shadows of that olive tree garden. Walk with me quietly past the main group of disciples waiting outside Gethsemane's gates. Tiptoe even more quietly past those three closest disciples—Peter, James, and John—sleeping in exhaustion inside the garden. Look over there, about a stone's throw away; do you see him, Jesus our Savior? He kneels and then he falls, stretched out full length in Gethsemane's dirt. Timidly we draw even closer and what do we see? Can that be his blood dripping down his brow, wrenched with his sweat from his glands and veins? Listen. He speaks, and the force of his words, the anguish and dread packed into them, rivets us to the spot. "Father," he begs, "if you are willing, take this cup from me." A second and then a third time he prays to his Father the same way as his crimson blood flows, and we watch in astonishment and dread.

"What's this? What's going on?" we have to ask. What crushes our Savior to the earth and causes him to beg? Isn't this the same Jesus who fearlessly faced his enemies, ferociously threw the money changers out of the temple, and calmly walked the raging waters of the sea? What's this cup that he dreads to drink? We know the answer because

we've heard it in other Lenten seasons. That cup was filled with the full force of hell's punishment for sin. The sins of Adam and Eve, the sins of Cain and Abel, the sins of David and Absalom, the sins of Judas and Peter, the sins of Jews and Gentiles, the sins of you and me—all these were distilled like some awful poison into that cup. Bitter beyond belief, bitter such as no human being had ever tasted even in the most dire circumstances, such was the cup raised to Jesus' lips. And his human nature shrank from the task. Above him, beneath him, around him, without and within him, all was anguish as the waves of hell began to break over him, our substitute in the shadows of Gethsemane. No wonder he turns to his Father, pleading, "Take this cup from me."

Today, standing in the shadows of Gethsemane, seeing what we have seen and hearing what we have heard, can we ever again consider any of our sins as something insignificant? As something that doesn't really matter all that much in the sight of our God? Can we ever again cover any of our sins with those worn-out excuses, like "I didn't know" or "It's not so bad" or "Everyone is doing it"? Can we ever again shrug our shoulders at those daily temptations or pet sins that are about as common to us as breathing? People, sin is serious. Each one of them is deadly. Each one of them helped fill that dreadful cup of which Jesus spoke. Each one of them made the Savior bleed. And not just your sins, but mine too, every single one of them.

That's our Jesus in the garden, shouldering our sins, suffering our punishment, satisfying the justice of a holy God. But why was he there? When a mother gets up night after night to feed her baby or stays up most of the night to tend to a sick child, do we have to ask why? Isn't it because she dearly loves that little one? When a parent works faithfully at a job to take care of the family and send children to college, do we really have to ask why? Isn't it because that parent loves them? When we hear Jesus plead, "Take this cup from me," and yet adding, "not my will, but yours be done," do we have to ask why? It has to be because he loves us, with a love that though I could preach till I'm one hundred, I'd never find adequate words to describe. His name fits, beautifully so. That's Jesus who loves the fallen world with an incredible, indescribable, unexplainable love.

II.

Walk back with me a second time into the shadows of Gethsemane to marvel at Jesus' wondrous love. This time it's love for his Father's will. Three times Jesus asked his Father to remove his load of suffering, to find some other way. Three times he looked his Father in the eye and asked, "May I pass?" When the answer was no, look at what the Savior did. There was no murmuring against the Father's will or questioning about the Father's wisdom. There were no doubts about the Father's love or dissatisfaction with the Father's way. Instead it was, "Not my will, but yours be done." Jesus' love for his Father knew only surrender to the Father's way and compliance with the Father's will even when it led from Gethsemane's shadows to Calvary's cross.

"Please, Lord," little Mike ended his prayer, "put the vitamins in the pie and the cake instead of in the carrots and the broccoli." How often don't we pray like that? We want things to be sweet and rosy, preferring that God put the vitamins of his blessing on

the wings of sunshine and song. And when he does, how easy it is to say, “Your will be done.” But when God doesn’t, when our health disappears and our family disappoints, when our plans don’t work out and our checkbook doesn’t balance, when friends prove unfaithful and gossip wounds deeply, when our faith is belittled and our convictions bad-mouthed, when the cross plunks down on our shoulders and seems far too heavy for us to carry, what do we do then? Does our response shift to “Not your will, but mine be done”? Does praying then become not asking God but demanding from him? Is it grumbling, then, against him because of the burden or asking for guidance to see the blessings?

The cabinetmaker knows well the need for the power sander to bring out the beauty in the wood. But if the wood could speak as that sander cuts into its surface and smooths out its imperfections, would it say, “Ouch!” or “Thank you”? Sometimes God’s sanding in our lives can be so painful that we rebel against his will, even accusing him of not caring for us or at the very least doubting his wisdom and his ways. Does anyone here know what I’m talking about—that sin of not loving our Father as we might so that we trust his will to lead us aright? Then it’s time to look again at our Jesus in the garden that first Maundy Thursday evening. He was there driven by his love for us so that we can find pardon for our sinful self-will and senseless rebellion against God’s will. Those drops of blood that dripped from his holy brow were the painful preview of how far his love was willing to take him—all the way to the cross to pay for our debt and wipe clean our slate. Then look again at our Savior in the shadows and find in him the power to submit to our Father’s will. There’s nothing wrong with praying, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me.” Jesus prayed that way too. But let’s be sure to add, “Yet not my will, but yours be done.” From Jesus our Savior, Jesus our helper, will come the strength we need, just as he once received strength from his Father, to follow our loving God’s always perfect will in our lives.

We call him Jesus. That’s our favorite name for him. God help us never to forget why. It’s because of his wondrous love that brought him down to earth to be our helper in our greatest need, our Savior from all our sins. Amen.