Prayer
Scripture: Acts 4: 18-21a; 5:27-32
Hymn: 351 "Beneath the Cross of Jesus"

AUSTRIAN ANABAPTISM:

After escaping from prison in Moravia, Hans Hut returned to Austria. He soon found a new mission field in Austria among the peasant miners. The Fuggers had brought in many foreign peasants to work their mines. Hut worked in Vienna and left a new congregation in the charge of Oswald Glatz. Then with a former monk, Jerome Hermann, and Eucharius Binder, he planted a congregation in the iron foundry won of Steyr. When the meetings came to the attention of the town authorities the preachers had to flee. Several of the converts were arrested, tried, and executed. Hut moved down the River Enns to Linz, where John Bunderlin was in charge of a congregation. Hut had baptized him in Augsburg in 1526 and commissioned him as an apostle to Linz, while serving as humanistic secretary to Baron von Stahremberg. Bunderlin and Hut were soon obliged to leave the work in the care of Leonard Friesleben. Hut moved to Freistadt where he strengthened the congregation. He worked for short times in Passau and Salzburg.

The great missionary harvest of Hut's feverish and intensive activity was soon ruthlessly wiped out by Ferdinand and his officially appointed constable. Hut's three ablest converts and fellow workers in Austria, Leonard Schliemer, John Schlaffer, and Ambrose Spittelmaier, all suffered martyrdom within a month or two of Hut's own martyrdom. Schliemer had been a Franciscan friar for six years. He was an Anabaptist apostle for six months. Hut sent him to preach in Steyr, Bavaria, Salzburg, the Tyrol, and in Rottenburg. He was arrested in Rottenburg, November 25, 1529. He escaped only to be captured again and executed. Schlaffer had been a Catholic priest. He came under the influence of Luther and then under that of Hut. He was captured an Anabaptist meeting at Schwatz on the Inn River, December 5, 1527. He wrote several tracts in prison before he was beheaded. Spittelmaier had received good university training. He was baptized by Hut and preached widely in Austria and Bavaria before he was beheaded at Cadolzburg.

The Austrian Anabaptists were not only zealous preachers. They were equally zealous in publishing tracts. Like Hut they emphasized the imminent coming of the Lord. They were very severe in their criticisms of Catholics, Lutherans, and Zwinglians, as only nominal Christians. Instead of the three Catholic sacraments of baptism, penance, and extreme unction, they preached adult repentance in the light of Anabaptist preaching, a life of contrition, and penitential suffering. They emphasized "Seven Decrees of Scripture": 1) a covenant with God sealed by baptism by pouring in name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; 2) the kingdom of God made up of the poor in spirit; 3) community of goods; 4) the end of the world; 5) the Last Judgment; 6) the resurrection; 7) the eternal punishment of the wicked.

THE MARTYRS' SYNOD IN AUGSBURG, AUGUST 1527:

The fierceness of their persecution and their missionary zeal led some sixty Anabaptist leaders to gather in Augsburg in August, 1527, to hold a synod. Some questioned Hut's apocalyptic preaching and wanted him to soften it, but Hut refused, declaring that he had to obey God rather than men. The first session was held in the home of a steward of the poor, Gall Vischer. The second and main session held on St. Bartholomew's Day, August 24, was held in the home of a butcher, Matthew Finder. The third session was in the home of another steward of the poor, Conrad Huber. Denck, who was more cautious in apocalyptic matters, did not attend the third session. Hut and his followers maintained that the synod was a sign of the last days before the millennium. Just as the Spirit came upon the apostles in the first apostolic council in the upper room, soon in the fullness of the dispensations, the Spirit would come
again with power, anointing apostles for the last days. The synod discussed the Seven Decrees of the Austrian Anabaptists, especially the Kingdom, the manner, and time of its appearing. Hut insisted it would be Pentecost, 1528. More apostles were ordained to preach the Anabaptist gospel which they believed would be the third and final reformation. They pledged themselves to go to all the major cities of Europe, especially to those where Anabaptists were forbidden to preach. They would preach until they were martyred. The synod came to be called 'The Martyrs' Synod because almost to a man they were put to death.

The patrician Langenmantel was arrested September 15, 1527. Though he weakened and renounced rebaptism he was banished. Hut was seized September 15, 1527. He was tortured. He burned to death in his prison cell December 6. One report was that he had been left unconscious on his pallet and that a candle left by the guard tipped over and set fire to the pallet. Another account reported that Hut himself set fire to the prison in an attempt to escape. The authorities were so angry over being cheated out of his execution that the next day they brought the body to court, tied the corpse up in a chair, held a formal trial in which he was condemned, and he was burned at the stake the following day.

Denck, disillusioned with the radicalism of the Anabaptists, returned to Basel where he submitted a moderated confession that denied rebaptism to Oecolampadius. Oecolampadius gave him refuge and published an edited edition of his confession as a recantation. Denck, before he was thirty-two, died of the plague. Before his death he had become something of a Spiritualist who condemned all divisive sectarianism, conforming to the established church of Basel.

Urbanus Rhegius, the leading priest in Augsburg, had been crowned imperial orator and poet laureat by Emperor Maximilian. He devoted much of his time, rhetorical skill, and theological cunning to Anabaptist research and refutation. He gathered his material from judicial hearings, confessions extracted by torture, and Anabaptist tracts and sermons. He charged the Anabaptist with seven errors: 1) Anabaptists declared that Christ was only a man and not God; 2) that Christ was conceived in sin; 3) that Christ had not done satisfaction for the sins of man; 4) that magistrates cannot be Christians; 5) that God will descend again to earth and a physical kingdom will be established; 6) that all governments will be wiped out and will not be endured; 7) that all things should be in common. In later pamphlets he added other charges: Anabaptists preached only secretly in houses and woods; Anabaptists relied on visions, dreams, and inspiration Anabaptists believed that Jesus was only a prophet; Mary was not the mother of God but only of Jesus; angels assumed flesh at the time the Word assumed flesh; among Christians there must be no violence or government; Christ would come again within two years. Under torture Spittellaier, Hut and Gall Vischer confessed to most of these points.

THE DIET OF SPEYER (Speier) 1529:

At the meeting of the Diet, April, 1529, the Catholic majority declared the Luthera had been refuted and they were ordered to conform to Catholic practice. On April 19, Lutherans and Zwinglians published a protest that gave them the name "Protestants." Lutherans approved of the Diet's condemnation of the Reformed Churches of Zwingli. Catholics, Lutherans, and Reformed agreed in the condemnation of Anabaptism and the declaration of the death penalty for the crime and heresy of rebaptizing. From April, 1529, the Anabaptists were hunted down and destroyed. Hounds were used in tracking them down.

THE SYNOD OF STRASSBURG:

In the late Middle Ages Strassburg had a reputation for judicial and penal moderation along with religious variety. There was a saying, "He who would be hanged anywhere else is simply driven from Strassburg by flogging." The twenty guilds of Strassburg each had a representative on the town council; the nobles had ten. The highest office was that of Stettmeister, held by four noblemen elected by their peers. Below the Stettmeister was the city manager, the Ammeister, elected for a year by fellow guildsmen in the council. Matthew Zell from the University of
Freiburg became rector of the cathedral parish, one of the seven parishes in the city, in 1518. He was won for the Lutheran Reformation and on February 16, 1526, conducted mass in German and administered communion in both kinds. He married and was excommunicated by the bishop, but still maintained friendly relations with the rest of the city clergy. On August 24, 1524, the magistrates opted for the Magisterial Reformation and took control of the city parishes. One of the city clergy was Wolfgang Captio, of the collegiate church of St. Thomas, a man of peaceful and charitable nature. His home was a haven for dissenters. He had studied law, medicine and theology in the universities of Pforzheim, Ingolstadt, and Freiburg. He was a Hebrew scholar and admirer of Erasmus. In 1523 he had visited Wittenburg and espoused Lutheranism. Another of the clergy was Martin Bucer, a Dominican who had been won for Lutheranism by Luther at Heidelberg. He came to St. Thomas' the same year as Captio (1523) and became the leader and spokesmen of the clergy of the city. He was won by Zwingli for the Reformed cause and was able to swing his magistracy of Strassburg officially declared itself for the Magisterial Reformation of Zwingli by abolishing the mass.

The Radical Reformation in Strassburg began in the summer of 1522 with the physician and lay preacher, Karsthans Maurer, who spoke out against the sacraments, hierarchy, and the magistrates in favor of the Bundschuh (the peasants). Soon the most outspoken of the Radicals was a lay preacher of the guild of the gardeners, shepherds and day laborers, Clement Ziegler. By 1524 he was denouncing the images and the mass as idolatry. Ziegler preached the Peasants' Revolt and peasants of Strassburg were in the thick of the troubles.

John Wolff, an obstreperous and eccentric weaver, was the third early leader of the radicals, preaching that the millennium would come at midnight, Ascension Day, 1533.

All three of the early leaders by 1526 were denouncing infant baptism. Despite their bitter attacks Zell declared that there was a place at his table and in heaven for all who accepted Christ. Captio expressed dissatisfaction with infant baptism but declared since it was neither proved nor forbidden by Scripture, it should be kept as a practical measure. Bucer spoke out against separatism and condemned rebaptism as putting too high a value on the outward.

Carlstadt, Reublin, Haetzer, Denck, Jacob Gross and Michael Sattler all came to Strassburg in 1526 and associated with the Radicals. Hubmaier also visited Strassburg. Denck and Haetzer were expelled. Sattler made a favorable impression on Captio and Bucer but felt constrained to leave. Jacob Gross brought to Strassburg large bands of refugees from St. Gall and Waldshut.

In September 1528, Pilgrim Marpeck, who would become one of the leading spokesmen for South German Anabaptism, arrived in Strassburg and joined the gardeners' guild. Born in Rattenberg in the Tyrol, educated in the Latin school, Marpeck was an engineer who was very successful in building municipal water systems. He acquired considerable wealth and became a town councilor. The Anabaptists Schiemer and Schlaffer both preached in the Tyrol. Marpeck had become interested in Lutheranism and then in Anabaptism. When he refused to cooperate with the magistrates in investigating the miners to catch Anabaptists, he was driven out and his estate was confiscated. Marpeck travelled to Strassburg where he associated with the Anabaptists and was baptized by Kautz. He thought of Anabaptism as the middle way between Catholicism and Lutheranism. In his preaching he was much concerned with social injustices. He developed a large timbering operation and his home in a village outside Strassburg became a meeting place of Anabaptists. The village was annexed by Strassburg. At first he was well received by the preachers of the city but they became increasingly uneasy about Marpeck, Fridolin, Reublin, and Kautz. The Anabaptists were summoned for a judicial hearing. Kautz and Reublin were imprisoned for eighty-six days. Hedio, Captio, and Bucer called for a public disputation. Kautz and Reublin submitted a written confession of their faith. The municipal preachers responded. The council threatened the Anabaptists if they did not desist. Reublin fled to Moravia. Kautz moderated his position. Marpeck became the chief
spokesman of Strassburg Anabaptism. On February 20, 1529, the town council abolished the mass.

Early in 1529 John Bunderlin from Linz sought asylum in Strassburg. Twice he was arrested for his preaching and writing. Johannes Baptista Italus also arrived from Italy in 1529. He preached repentance and an apocalyptic message. Caspar Schwenckfeld, who had fallen out with Luther over Spiritualism, came to Strassburg. He preached an internal baptism and an invisible church. He strongly opposed the Anabaptists.

In June of 1529 Melchior Hofmann, a furrier by trade, and who had been a very successful Lutheran itinerant evangelist, came to Strassburg. In 1523 he had been Luther's apostle to Livonia, preaching in Dorpat and Riga. He became acquainted with Carlstadt's writings and became increasingly interested in eschatology. He came to consider himself a prophet. In the fall of 1525 he went to Reval, supporting himself with his trade. By 1526 he had gathered a large German Lutheran community. In 1527 he was in Holstein. He had moved to a sacramentarian position on the eucharist and Luther began warning Lutheran princes against him. He met Carlstadt in East Frisia. Hofmann became very critical of education and developed his own allegorical and spiritualizing interpretation of Scripture with an emphasis on eschatology.

Soon after arriving in Strassburg Hofmann decried that Rome was spiritual Babylon, that he was the new Elijah, and that Strassburg was the spiritual Jerusalem. There the 144,000 heralds would gather. After a terrible siege Strassburg would be victorious and be the center of the kingdom. Hofmann had not joined the Anabaptists when he presented a petition to the council demanding that the Anabaptists be given equal rights and they be assigned one of the church buildings of the city. The city council ordered his arrest for sedition and on April 23, 1530 he escaped and headed for Emden where he established an Anabaptist congregation. He secretly returned to Strassburg in 1530 and again departed.

Sebastian Franck, a Catholic priest, who had become a Lutheran and then a Spiritualist, moved to Strassburg in 1529, and gained a following. He was arrested and expelled.

Christian Entfelder, a disciple of Denck and friend of Hubmaier, came to Strassburg in 1529. He preached and wrote for the Anabaptists. Michael Servetus, a Catholic physician, who had become a heretic came to Strassburg in 1531, where he was an embarrassment. Also coming to Strassburg in 1531 was John Campanus who had broken with Luther on the eucharist and on the Trinity—he denied the Spirit was a person.

Marpeck had continued the principal spokesmen of the Anabaptists. A model of Christian living, he got along with Bucer with whom he was in continual dialogue on religious matters. He urged rebaptism and strick church discipline. In December 1531 Marpeck requested a public debate. The council granted him a colloquium before the twenty-one and the pastors on December 9, 1531. At the end Marpeck was ordered to "keep his mouth shut." He had another discussion with Bucer. The preachers asked for a public discussion. Marpeck presented his "Confession of Faith" consisting of twenty-eight articles. Bucer dealt with them article by article. On December 13 the council ordered him to desist his attempts to overthrow infant baptism and to establish a separatist church. Marpeck notified the council he would leave Strassburg but asked a period of grace of two weeks to prepare for his departure. He had a least one more disputation before he left for Moravia.

Marpeck carried on extended oral and written debates with Schwenckfeld.

Hofmann returned to Strassburg and actively spread his eschatology. The authorities ordered his arrest, December 11, 1531. He managed to escape and traveled through Hesse preaching the imminent return of Christ. He returned to Strassburg in the spring of 1533, publishing numerous tracts and preaching. He was arrested and underwent two judicial hearings.

In June of 1533 Strassburg held an extended synod aimed at refuting the Radical Reforms and arriving at religious peace in the city. Numerous judicial
hearings were held and the magistrates set penalties for heretics and schismatics.

Four days after the municipal synod, a territorial synod was convened in Strassburg on June 10, 1533. The synod examined the various radical leaders. Ziegler and Storen were found to be relatively harmless and were dismissed. At a first hearing Hofmann set forth his doctrine in detail. Schwenckfeld was taken ill in the midst of his hearing. Hofmann was recalled. Nicholas Frey was tried for Bigamy and Anabaptism. In October the synod met again. Ziegler and Storen were banished. Engelbrecht was censured. Schwenckfeld was expelled. Nicholas Frey was drowned for bigamy. Helchoir Hofmann was given life imprisonment. Scharnschlager, a soapmaker from Tyrol, who had taken Marpeck's place as leader of the Anabaptists pled with the council for freedom of conscience.

In February and March, 1535, Strassburg aborted its policy of tolerance and ordered all infants baptized and all citizens to take an oath to support the magistrates.