

8 April 2004
Maundy Thursday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Living in Repentance”

Text: Hebrews 10:19-39; Luke 22:7-20

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

All sin is serious. Not only those sins which we consider really big and awful, but also those sins which most think are harmless and fun. Not only murder, but also gossip and little white lies. Even those sins which our world now says it is legal and alright to do. All sin is serious because all sin is a violation of the First Commandment. It is to make myself god, doing what I want, following my will, proclaiming that I know what is best and right for me. And so sin is the very opposite of faith. Faith in the true God. Faith which wants what God wants, which follows His will, and which proclaims that He knows what is best and right for me. You can't have it both ways. You cannot serve both God and money, or yourself, or anything else in this world.

And this the author of the book of Hebrews wants us to understand when he writes: ***“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.”*** That's a pretty serious statement, and one that we will not understand if we do not see all sin as a violation of the First Commandment. For it is not the individual sins that we do that is being spoken of here. That if I do a particular sin more than once, or more than ten times, or more than a hundred times, then I won't be forgiven! No, what is being spoken of here is rather the fact that all sin is the very opposite of faith in God. And so to continue in sin; to go on sinning in an ongoing and deliberate way; to insist that I will do what I want, that I will follow my will, that I know what is best and right . . . such a life leads to unbelief. It is to fear, love, and trust in myself rather than God. It is to dethrone the true God and enthrone myself. It is to put my faith in myself, rather than God. And if that is the case, ***“it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”***

And so, it would follow, if we want to be saved, we should not sin. And this is true – except that we're not capable of that! We confess that we are *born* sinful and unclean. Sin *lives* in us and we are not capable of not sinning. . . . So what, then, shall we do? The answer is this: the opposite of living in sin is not to do the impossible – to stop sinning; no, the opposite of living in sin is to instead **live in repentance**. For if all sin is

the exact opposite of and a violation of the First Commandment, it is repentance that is the *keeping* of the First Commandment in the fullest way. For when we repent; when humble ourselves and fall before God in sorrow for our sin; when we rely on Him for forgiveness; when we put our faith and hope in Him and His promises, this is to “*fear, love, and trust in Him above all things.*” This is the worship that He desires. For the true and highest worship of God is not that we serve God, but that God serves us with His forgiveness, life, and salvation. (Augsburg Confession XXI.3; Apology IV.154, 310) For these are His gifts that *strengthen our faith* and keep us in Him.

That is why we are gathered here tonight. To repent, and receive the forgiveness of our Lord. To repent, that our faith may be strengthened. To repent, and receive the life of our Saviour in His body and blood. For the body and blood of Jesus is what this night is all about. . . . Tonight is the night that Jesus is betrayed. Tonight He is arrested. Tonight He is taken captive, that tomorrow He might be crucified. The Lamb of God will lay down His life for the life of the world. He will be the atonement for our sins. He will satisfy in His death the justice of God against sin, for having no sin to pay for Himself, the payment He makes is the payment for our sin. All is about to be accomplished.

But before that can happen, Jesus provides the means by which we might receive the benefit of all that He will do for us. He puts into effect the *New Testament* of His body and blood. This is, if you will, His “last will and testament” – what He is now leaving behind to provide and give to His disciples of all time all that we need. No mere meal is this. No one last good time together before Jesus is taken. No, this is, as Jesus says, “*for you.*” His body, **for you**. His blood, **for you**. And in, with, and under His body and blood, all that Jesus is and all that Jesus has, given **for you**. For as you eat and drink His body and blood, you do not just receive a part of your Saviour, but all of Him. And so here is His cross, **for you**. His forgiveness, **for you**. His kingdom, **for you**. His death and resurrection, **for you**. His life, **for you**.

And as we here receive His body and blood, we confess, “*Yes, for me.*” His life, **for me**. His forgiveness, **for me**. His kingdom, **for me**. His death and resurrection, **for me**. . . . Faith receives these gifts and is strengthened. For although my sin is serious, here is the One even greater, who does not hold my sin against me. Who forgives the guilt of my sin. . . . And no cheap grace is this. No simple overlooking, or ignoring, or excusing of my sin! No, here is forgiveness that has come at a great price – the death of God’s only Son in the flesh and blood of Jesus. His flesh and blood given for me in love. His body and blood now given to me in love, that I may not be separated from Him, but that I may be His own.

Yes, this is **for me**. And so I will repent. I will repent so that I may receive what I do not

have, and what I need. Here there is no room for my pride; no place for my excuses; no possible justification for what I have done. I will only repent, and put my faith not in myself, but in my Saviour. For if He gave Himself up for me on the cross, and gives Himself to me here in His body and blood, He will not withhold anything from me. And so I will repent, that I may be saved.

For Jesus said “***Do this in remembrance of Me.***” Or literally, *keep doing this*. As often as you do this. He wants us here. He wants us here with our sin, so that His blood can wash that sin away. He wants us here with our weak faith, so that He can strengthen that faith. He wants us here because He is here. And if He is here, my sin is not. If He is here, my death is not. If He is here, then Heaven is here, and I have been raised to a new life. And if He is here, then the hands we are in are not the angry hands of a holy God offended by our sin, but the nail-pierced hands of the God who died for our sin. And in those hands we are safe, we are secure, we are forgiven.

The world will tell you that your sin isn't that bad, so don't worry about it, and don't make such a big deal about it. Jesus said your sin is that bad, and even worse than you know . . . *but don't worry about it!* Because He worried about it. He dealt with it. And He has provided here, **for you**, the remedy. So come in repentance, come in confidence, come in faith, and receive His life and forgiveness.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.