

9 April 2004
Good Friday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“In the Darkness Hangs the Light”

Text: John 19:30

When we're little, we're scared of the dark. The dark is the time of nightmares. It is the time of strange and dreadful sounds. It is the time of separation and uncertainty and of aloneness.

When we get a little older, we begin to lose that fear. More mature minds can explain it and understand it. We can handle it, just as at one point in our lives we believed we could handle anything that came our way! The darkness is no big deal anymore.

But then at some point in our lives again – for some it comes sooner, for some later – we begin to see, *and fear*, the darkness again. We realize that the darkness we feared as a child is real. Maybe as children we didn't know why we were afraid and we didn't understand our fear, but then you come to realize that in our world there is the stuff of nightmares. The darkness of sin, the darkness of evil, and the darkness of death surround us and threaten to engulf us. And in that darkness are strange and dreadful sounds; separation and uncertainty; and aloneness. And then what's worse, we come to realize that this darkness isn't just outside of us and around us, but also within us. The same sin and evil living in us and corrupting our hearts. Its not only others – it is me. . . . And we realize that when we were children, we weren't so far off! The darkness is something to be afraid of after all!

And so when Jesus is arrested, He says, ***“this is the hour and the power (or the authority) of the darkness.”*** (Lk 22:53) For this is what the darkness does – it kills. From Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, to the sin that we commit, to the Son of God on the cross. And so also we are told that from the sixth hour to the ninth hour, as Jesus was hanging on the cross, as His life was being extinguished, there was darkness over all the land. (Mt 27:45) A second century theologian named Melito of Sardis said that because man was not ashamed to look upon his Creator hanging on a cross, the sun stopped shining that it might hide Him. (Richard John Neuhaus, *Death on a Friday Afternoon*, 257) The darkness we fear is but a slight premonition of the darkness in which Jesus hung on the cross. The darkness we experience is but a slight taste of all that attacked Jesus on the cross. Of that darkness we will soon again hear from Psalm 22, ***“Many bulls have compassed me: Strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, As a ravening and a roaring lion.”***

But when we are children, our parents do not leave us to our fears. The darkness is too much for us . . . and so light is provided. A light to lighten the darkness. Perhaps it is only a small nightlight – so small against the deep darkness. *But it is enough.* It scatters the darkness. The darkness cannot overcome it. As small and weak as it may be, the light wins.

And while tonight is a service of darkness, as we remember the darkness of our Lord's crucifixion, there is also light. In the midst of the darkness, our Father has provided us light. (Mt 4:16) It is the light of the cross. The cross, which look small and weak in the midst of such great evil and the deep darkness that surrounds us. *But it is enough.* It scatters the darkness within us and around us. The darkness cannot overcome it. (Jn 1:5) The light wins.

Jesus said, ***"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*** (Jn 8:12) That light never shone so brightly as it did on the cross. As it did when Jesus said, ***"It is finished."*** For what is finished? His life? Yes. His sacrifice for us? Yes. But also, it is finished. The darkness, evil, sin, death, and devil – they are finished. Their reign is finished. Their power is finished. Their grip on us is finished.

Now that is not to say that there is not still darkness around us and in us – there most certainly is! You know that. But it cannot win. Even when things look hopeless and bleak, it cannot win. Even when it seems like the darkness is winning, it cannot overcome. Even when your sin seems too much for you, it is forgiven. **It is finished.** Our Father has given us light in the light of His Son, the Light of the world, on the cross. He reigns, not the darkness, no matter what the darkness would like us to think!

And that we will see again this night. As we continue through the service, the darkness will deepen; the candles will be extinguished, one by one. But one candle, one small nightlight, cannot be extinguished. And though it will leave, it will return. And we have hope. For our Father has not left us in the dark. Good Friday is not the last word – Easter is. And ***"though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*** (Psalm 23:4)

And then it will be silent . . . at the end of this service. The words of Jesus finished. He breathes His last and gives up His Spirit. He gives us His Spirit, that we may believe; that His light may shine on us. . . . It will be silent. Appropriately, for this story started quietly too. On a silent, holy night in Bethlehem. But on that quiet night, somewhere outside of Bethlehem, was also the song of the choir of angels, rejoicing that the Son of God had become a son of man. Tonight too. Listen. For even this night, in the darkness,

in the quiet, is the song of Easter. For tonight, the Son of Man shines for us. **He has won.**

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