

9 March 2005  
Lent 4 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

### “Remaining Silent”

Text: Isaiah 53:7 (Matthew 26:57-62; 27:1-2, 11-14; James 1:26; 3:5-9)

*Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never hurt me!* Remember saying that when you were little? But it’s not true, is it? Names, ridicule, and hurtful speech often hurts more – *much more* – than physical injuries. The tongue is one of the strongest muscles we have in our bodies, and it is also one of the most dangerous. We may hesitate before *acting out* in sin, but how easily come the sins from our mouths! The lies, the gossip, the half-truths, the name calling, the slander, the betrayal, the putting down, the hatred, the accusations, the cursing, the deception, the ridicule. And it’s so easy, isn’t it? And, we have to admit, often times delicious, and *so* satisfying!

And what makes our words so dangerous is that once they’re out there, you can’t take them back! Oh, how often have we put our foot in our mouth, or said something hurtful, or – how does it go? – put our mouths in motion before we put our minds in gear, and wished we could take our words back! But you can’t. They’re out there, and the damage has been done. We’ve wounded; we’ve hurt; we’ve killed. James was right – who can tame the tongue?

Well tonight we heard who. Jesus, our suffering – and silent – servant. Twice Isaiah said it in the verse we heard tonight. He wants us to know. He wants to emphasize it. Hear again, and let the full impact of those words wash over you. ***“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”***

What do we do when we are, or *think* we are, oppressed? Not given our freedom, or unduly restricted, not being able to exercise our rights? When we think things aren’t fair? . . . What do we do when we are afflicted with any kind of injustice, or suffering, or unfortunate event? What do we do? We blame others, we protest, we grumble and complain, we accuse and blame God. We speak, and we expect a hearing! And if people don’t listen, we speak louder! And if we still don’t get satisfaction, well I’m not going down alone! And we use our tongues to drag others down with us.

How utterly incredible, then, our suffering servant. He will not drag others down with

Him. He will bear this alone. He does not speak – even when given opportunity; even when implored to do so! He will not respond as we respond. Although innocent, He does not defend Himself. Although powerful, He does not call on His angels to defend Him. Although slandered, He does not object. His own honor and name are not His concern. But to do the will of His Father. To lay down His life. To take our place. His honor and glory would be in that. And so He opens not His mouth.

And by not speaking, Jesus fulfills the Law for us. The Law that we can't keep. We're used to thinking of that – of Jesus keeping the Law for us – in terms of what Jesus did, His actions. But it is also true with His words, His speech. Jesus suffered in silence to make up for all the times when we should have kept quiet, but we did not. Jesus silent suffering atoned for all our cursing, our shouting, our disrespectful words, our gossip and slander. Jesus' willing silence has made amends for all the times we have put our foot in our mouth – for our careless words, our hasty speech, our rash talk. And so taking our place, and our punishment – silently – we are forgiven. Our Father looks at us and sees not our sinful tongues, but our Saviour's silent tongue. Our sin has been replaced with His perfection.

And imagine what kind of world this would be if our tongues were tamed like that! I imagine it would be a lot quieter! But we're not good at silence, are we? But why not? Is it fear, that we will not be cared for unless we speak up? Is it insecurity, that we can not rise unless we put others down? Is it pride, thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought? Is it envy, wanting for ourselves what we see others have? . . . But we do not need our tongues for that – only faith. For our Heavenly Father has promised us all of that.

+ He has promised that He will care for us, giving us always exactly what we need, even His own Son to die for our sins. He have His care.

+ He has promised us that in Him we are secure, for He has made us His children in Holy Baptism. We are sons and daughters of the King, who has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. We are secure in Him.

+ And He has promised to give us His kingdom, promising us the forgiveness of our sins, a life that will never end, and the peace and joy of His salvation. What else do we want that He has not provided?

And He can provide all of this for us far better than we could get it for ourselves! And this we see in our Saviour, our suffering servant. Who in perfect faith did not open His mouth, but willingly went to the cross, entrusting Himself fully to His Father. And He

was vindicated. His resurrection is proof of His Father's satisfaction. And now risen from the dead and ascended into Heaven, He sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, with all things having been put under His feet. Not because He spoke, but because He, in faith, remained silent.

And your Father will keep His promises to you too. His promises to you in Christ. In Christ who has taken your place. Your sin is His, His forgiveness is yours. Your death is His, His life is your. Your grave is His, His kingdom is yours. He was silent, that all that would be true. And now we can be silent, *because* it is true! And use our tongues only to speak good, to build up, to defend others, and to proclaim the greatness of the Lord; of our Saviour, our suffering servant.

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