

12 February 2006
Epiphany 6

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“His Victory, Our Victory”

Text: Job 7:1-7; Mark 1:29-39; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

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

Job is an Old Testament saint most people can relate to. We often have bad days, and sometimes really bad days, but it was Job who had the mother of all bad days! One day he had everything; the next day he had nothing. What had taken him a lifetime to achieve was gone in a heartbeat. And he didn't know why. The wave of destruction and despair that swept so suddenly over Job made him feel as if he had gotten the wind knocked out of him. Each breath that he took he thought might be his last. The light of life had turned into the darkness of misery. . . . And you can relate to that, can't you? You've felt it too. The “being kicked in the gut” feeling, betrayed by friends, attacked by enemies, wondering where is God in all this? Life as hard service, emptiness, misery, and perhaps praying with the Psalmist, “How long, O Lord? How long?” (Ps 13)

But as I read these words of Job, I thought of another person who might have prayed these same words, and long before Job – and that is Adam. Oh, in the beginning, it was not like this for Adam. He had work to do, taking care of the Garden, but it was pleasant and pleasing work. Enjoyable work, which yielded him great satisfaction. Until that day when everything changed. When Satan, instead of giving him what he promised, turned around and kicked him in the gut. Because that's what Satan does, you know – he promises you everything, and delivers nothing. And removed from the Garden, with Satan's howls of laughter and betrayal ringing in his ears, Adam's pleasant and pleasing work became hard service. Toil. Sweat, aches, pains . . . and death. Now there was death. Ancient Jewish legend has it that Adam sinned on the day of his creation so that when the sun went down that night (a thing which Adam had never seen before!), he thought the sun had died. What a long night that must have been! Waiting for the dawn; waiting for the light; waiting for hope.

And you know it too. It can seem so long, can't it? The darkness of struggle, the despair, the disappointment, the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Can you hear the

laughter of Satan ringing in your ears after he has duped you again? . . . Adam, Job, you and me, we're all the same; cut from the same cloth. The breath of life God breathed into Adam and the breath of His Spirit now given to us, Satan is trying to squeeze out of us. For that is how Satan works. That old serpent doesn't so much bite us and fill us with his poison, as he wraps himself around us to slowly and painfully squeeze the breath out of us. Tighter and tighter. Day by day. Tighter and tighter. Trying to kill our faith. Tighter and tighter. To make us his, and consume us. Tighter and tighter. God's people, His Church, you and me – Satan wants it all.

That is why when Job said, "Has not man a hard service on earth" he used a military word there. For as long as we're in this world, it's a battle. A war. Against the old evil foe, attacking Adam, attacking Job, and attacking all of us. And it's a battle you can't win. For if you try to beat him on your own, you will just wind up like Job – with the wind knocked out of you; despairing and wondering; helpless and hopeless. . . . Yet we try, don't we? We think we're strong enough. We think we're wise enough. We think we're dedicated enough. We think we're more able than Adam and Job? Do you hear the laughter? That's your enemy, licking his chops.

Repent. Drop the foolishness. Drop your illusions of self-sufficiency, of your own strength and abilities, and trust instead the One who has come to fight for you. The Son of God, whose power is made perfect in weakness. (2 Cor 12:9) Who comes in our flesh and blood, to do what we are unable to do. In Him, a new Adam, a new Job enters the battlefield, to not just knock the wind out of our enemy and loosen His grip on us, but to crush his head with His heel. To win the victory and give hope to the hopeless.

Now what does that battlefield look like? It looks like the house of Simon and Andrew, where Jesus heals a mother-in-law of her fever. Where the whole city gathers at the door with their sick and demon-oppressed, and Jesus heals them and drives out the demons. It looks like the desolate place where Jesus goes to pray, and the region of Galilee where the Word of God is preached. It looks like the battlefields described by St. Paul, where the Word of God fights for Jews and Gentiles and Converts and all people. It looks like a small Lutheran church in Vienna, Virginia, where words, and water, and bread and wine are used as divine means to give forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. It looks like a room in a nursing home, where the Good Shepherd tends one of His lambs through one of His undershepherds. It looks like your houses, where instead of anger, resentment, and revenge, forgiveness is given. It looks like a cemetery, where a Pastor proclaims, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor 15:55) confident that death is not the end. For in all these places, and in all these ways, the victory of Christ is

manifesting itself. The death and resurrection of Christ is loosening the grip of the evil one, crushing his head, and winning the victory. The victory won by Christ in time, but applied for eternity.

And so the rising and dawn that Job so longed for, and that in the midst of his struggle he wonders will ever come, has indeed come. And it is the message you have heard this Christmas-Epiphany season. That “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.” (Is 9:2) It is the light of Christ. The light of His life. The light of His resurrection. The light no darkness can overcome. (John 1:5) No matter how dark it may seem in your life; no matter how desperate things may seem; no matter the enormity of your sin; no matter how long the night may seem; no matter the greatness of the struggle; the dawn of Easter morning and the rising of the Son of God means not only hope, but victory. For Adam, for Job, and for you and me.

And the old, evil foe knows it. He knows it, so he doesn't want you to hear of it, or know it, or worst of all, believe it and live it! And so he fills your ears with his lies, and your eyes with his mirages of pleasures, and your hearts with many and various desires, that lead you anywhere but here! Anywhere but to the light and forgiveness of Christ. For this deception is all he has left. His scaly body that he wrapped around the Son of God on the cross to squeeze the life out of Him was ripped open in the resurrection. He has no power anymore, except the power of his lies, to deceive us and mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. (Explanation to the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer) To deceive us back into his life-stealing squeeze; to think that our sin is but a harmless, warm embrace. To deceive us into thinking it is better to be served than to serve; to fight for our rights rather than give up our rights; to demand satisfaction, rather than give up our right for revenge in forgiveness.

But do not listen! Don't go back. Do not listen to and follow the wisdom and ways of this world. Do not listen to all the modern-day friends of Job who would lead you away from Christ and His cross. Listen instead to the victorious words of your Saviour, spoken here. Words that the world (and maybe sometimes you and me) may think are weak and powerless, but which Satan is terrified of! Because they are the words that crush him! The words of forgiveness, new life, resurrection, and salvation. . . . And so what is that Word that you hear here? It is the Word of God in the water of your Baptism that has washed you clean, raised you from the dead, and claimed you as a child of God. It is the Word of God in the Absolution that scatters the darkness of sin and gives new life and forgiveness. It is the Word of God which is preached that is “a lamp to your feet, and a

light for your path” (Ps 119) leading you through this life. And it is the Word of God in the Supper that not only fills your ears but also your mouths with the true body and blood of Christ and the salvation only He can give. It is the Word of your Saviour, giving you His victory. His victory over your sin on the cross. His victory over your death in the resurrection. His victory, which is now your victory.

And it is Job’s victory too. We are not told how long his struggle lasted, but in the end the dawn came, and he was raised and given life – and not just his life of wealth and riches back, but more importantly, eternal life. Satan put the squeeze on him, but couldn’t win. . . . And he can’t win you. You might feel like you’re in the squeeze right now; the road may seem long and dark. So repent, and rely not on your strength but His strength. And rejoice, for the struggle of faith is good, not bad. The blessings of God come in both cross and resurrection. God never forgets. His light is here. All He does is for the sake of the Gospel. You are forgiven and are a new creation. Maybe right now, like Job, you cannot see it. But faith never relies on what it can see, but on what it hears. And the Word of the Lord, the Word made flesh, the new Adam, the new Job, is speaking to you. His victorious Word of forgiveness and life. Hear it. Don’t go back. Don’t give in. Believe. Forgive. Serve. Lay down your life for others. Don’t be afraid. The victory is Christ’s! The victory is yours. Live like it! Not in fear, but in faith. Not in despair, but delighting in your cross.

For while Satan may have had the first laugh, the One who laughed last, laughed loudest.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus our Lord unto everlasting life. Amen.