

13 April 2006
Maundy Thursday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“It is I”

Text: Mark 14:12-26 (Exodus 24:3-11; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

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

Is it I?
So asked all twelve. Each in his own turn. Not one of the disciples is sure of himself. ***Is it I?*** It could be. It has been. What Jesus spoke of the one would really be true of them all. Judas Iscariot would betray Him into the hands of those who would crucify Him, but which among them would not betray Him in the hours ahead? They all would. Denying, running away, abandoning Him. There is plenty of guilt to go around. They were *all* dipping bread into the dish with Him. So if we can say that Peter was the first among equals, perhaps we could also say that in the opposite way, Judas also was the first among equals.

And tonight, we join the twelve. In the upper room with Jesus, and in asking, ***“Is it I?”*** And knowing the answer. It is as we confessed: *I am a poor, miserable sinner*. For to sin means to betray our God. It is to put someone or something before God in my life. It is to fear, love, and trust someone or something more than He, for my life, for my happiness, for what I need. It is I. It is you. It is us. Jesus’ statement is meant to confront us, convict us, and crush us. Don’t blame Judas for Jesus’ crucifixion; blame yourself. And you would not be wrong.

But there is another ***“It is I”*** that we heard this night, and one whose importance far exceeds our own. It is, in fact, the answer to our own. It is when Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to His disciples and said: ***It is I. This is My Body.*** And then when He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them and said: ***It is I. This is My Blood.*** And with those simple statements we see a profound truth: that in the sacrifice of His body and blood, hung unto death on the cross, and given us to eat and to drink, Jesus is taking what is ours, and giving us what is His. He takes our *It is I*, and gives us His *It is I*. He takes our guilt, and gives us His life. Before He is handed over to death, He hands Himself over to us.

And so guilt is met with gift. And the two are not equal. The gift overwhelms and far

outweighs the guilt. It is the way of God, as it has been since the very beginning. For in the beginning, when Adam and Eve sinned, guilt was met with gift – the promise of a Saviour. So it was down through the years of patriarchs and prophets – guilt was met with gift. When Jesus walked through the towns and villages, eating with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners – guilt was met with gift. In the ancient Church, this day was the day when the penitents were received back into the community, their guilt removed by the gift. *And so too for us.* Not only tonight, but especially tonight. That we might see the gift given here, and the gift of the sacrifice to come, aright. That we come crushed in our failures and sins, with our broken lives, in all of our woeful inadequacy to be called children of God – so that our guilt will be met with His gift. Our guilt washed away in the flood of Jesus' blood. That we hear again the most wonderful words in the world: **your sins are forgiven.**

And *that* is the gift. It is not just the body and blood of our Lord that is the gift given tonight, for just that, while precious, would do us no eternal good. No, it is the promise of God attached and bound to the body and blood of our Lord, the promise of the forgiveness of our sins – *that* is the gift. And by faith we receive that promised forgiveness. Faith not in myself; not in my ability to improve and get better; and not in my commitment or recommitment to God. But faith in the promise of God. Believing that this body and blood that I here eat and drink, were given and shed *for me*, to atone for my sin, to wash me clean, to grant me forgiveness. And that no sin is too big. That though I come to this altar, this table, an Adam, a Judas, a Peter – a betrayer, a sinner, a repeat offender, with nothing to offer God – guilt is met with gift, and *I leave a saint.* A sinner made holy through the blood of the covenant, the blood of the Lamb of God.

Tomorrow night, we will hear once again of the slaughter of that Lamb. Who goes as it is written of Him. Who goes willingly. Who goes in love for you. Tonight, we receive that Lamb, eating His body, drinking His blood, and so as St. Paul said, we become one in Him; one as His body. That tomorrow night we see not only *His* crucifixion, but *ours* as well. That joined to Him and one in Him, His death become our death, His resurrection our resurrection, and His life our life. That our participation in the body and blood of Christ be our participation in His passing through death and into life eternal. That the old sinner in us be slain, and the new man arisen. And that even though that old Adam, that old Judas, that old Peter in us continues to live on, and continues to lead us where we do not want to go, and do that which we do not want to do (Rom 7), and plunge us into sin – that we do not fear, or despair, but know that greater than our guilt is the gift. The gift that will never run out, the cup that will never run dry.

And so tonight we confess: ***It is I.*** We do so not to make ourselves feel bad, or to make ourselves somehow worthy through self-hatred and abasement. No, it is for one reason

only: *to receive the gift* – the forgiveness of our sin spoken in the Words of Absolution, and the forgiveness of our sin given in our Lord's body and blood. So come to His table, and receive. And receiving, see. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It is He, here for you.

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