

14 April 2006
Good Friday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“A Night of Solemn Joy”

Text: John 19:17-30

Tonight is a night filled not with sorrow, but with solemn joy. For we see tonight, as nowhere else, the great love that God has for us; the great love that our Saviour, the Bridegroom, has for His Bride, the Church. Love that would cause Him to take the sin of the world upon Himself, that it might be taken away from us. That we who are guilty, be declared not guilty. That we who are dead in our trespasses and sins, might have new life. That we who have turned away from God, might be turned back to Him in repentance and faith, to receive His forgiveness. That is what this night is all about.

We will hear the words of Jesus spoken from the cross. His seven last words. And as we do, take note of how filled with love and hope they are! These are not words of despair – but words of a Saviour, accomplishing salvation; of a Shepherd, laying down His life for His sheep; of a King, bestowing His riches on His people.

+ **Father, forgive them.** There is no anger against those who crucify Him. No anger against us for our sins which crucify Him. Only a prayer of divine mercy. That the forgiveness of our sins which Jesus is dying to provide, not only be given, but also be received by us by faith. That is His prayer for you. That you believe.

+ **You will be with Me in Paradise.** After His prayer, a promise. It would seem like a man condemned as a criminal, hanging naked on a cross, and hours from death, would have nothing to give or promise! But the kingdom of this King is not of this world. And His Word is truth. In Him, death is now but the gate to His kingdom and everlasting life.

+ **Woman, behold your son.** His hands pinned to the cross by nails, Jesus reaches out with the hands of His heart. Divine compassion and care, that nothing can stop – not even the suffering and death of the cross. So it was for Mary, so it is for you.

+ **My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?** Jesus asks the question, that we might fill in the answer. Why? *For me.* In my place. That the forsakenness, abandonment, and condemnation that I deserve because of my sins, be *not* given to me. But that as God and man were brought together in the person of Jesus, so in Jesus I would be reunited with God, in holiness and righteousness, both now and forever.

+ **I thirst.** He is truly and fully human, thirsting, suffering. In every way like you and me, only without sin. But we hear here also the reason why He became man, and why He went to the cross – His thirst for us and for our salvation. And so He drinks the cup of suffering and death, which cannot satisfy His thirst, that He would be for us the cup of salvation and the source of living water, that we might never thirst again.

+ **It is finished.** Not His life is finished. No, our sin is finished. Not His life is finished. No, our separation from God is finished. Not His life is finished. No, our condemnation is finished. For the Lamb of God has taken away the sin of the world. All the sacrifices of the Old Testament are finished. The New Testament in His blood has come.

And finally,

+ **Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.** One more prayer. A prayer of faith. It is also our prayer. A prayer of trust. That through Christ our Saviour, we have a loving Father, and there is no better place to be than in His hands. In death, and in life. When we breathe our last in death, and when we breathe our first breath every morning, in our little, daily resurrections.

Seven words of grace. How can these words not bring us joy? And how can these words not cause us to repent? And to pray that Jesus' faith be our faith; that His joy be our joy; that His life be our life. That as Jesus did not love His life, but gave it willingly for you and for me, that we too take up our cross and follow Him. Laying down our lives for each other, leaving our sin behind, and in that finding not sorrow, but joy. To see tonight not only Jesus' crucifixion, but also our own. That dying to sin, our Saviour raise us and create us anew. And to find that in that we have lost nothing, and gained everything.

So tonight, do not sorrow. Jesus does not want your sympathy, your pity. He wants you, your repentance, and your faith. He wants you to see His cross as His throne; His suffering as His glory; and His death as your salvation. For this day is a day of solemn joy. *Tonight we celebrate Satan's defeat.* That as Satan once deceived Adam and Eve by a tree in the Garden, so now Satan has been overcome by the tree of the cross. Overcome in the world. Overcome in you. And you are free.

So as the candles are extinguished now, think on these things. And see not only the ebbing life of the Son of God on the cross, but the ebbing of the dominion of Satan, the dominion of sin, and the dominion of death. Until there is only One that remains. The

Light of the world. The Light which cannot be extinguished. The Light which leaves in death, but returns in resurrection victory. And by grace, through faith in Him, it is your victory.

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