

21 March 2007  
Lent 4 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“The Darkness Where God Is”

Text: Genesis 32:22-32; Luke 23:44-46

Day and night, darkness and light. It is the natural cycle of this life. And we need both. If we have all light and no darkness, or all darkness and no light, we will quickly go mad. It isn't natural. We need the night so our bodies can rest and recharge, grow and regenerate, so that we can work and play during the day.

But one thing you need to know: *the order is important.*

We usually think of the *morning* as the beginning of the day, right? The alarm clock goes off and we're up and at 'em! Ready to go! Ready to take on a whole new day, with all the challenges and opportunities that lie before us. . . . The Scriptures, however, speak differently. From the very start. As we read repeatedly in Genesis, in the story of the creation: *And there was evening and there was morning*; that is what constituted each day. For God, it is not the light that begins a new day, but the darkness. Evening *then* morning. Darkness *then* light.

Which is to say: first *His* work; then *our* work.

When we get the order wrong, everything falls apart, and we quickly grow *spiritually* mad. We forget who's in control. We become preoccupied with ourselves. We live by sight and not by faith. . . . Now that's not to say that God doesn't work in our lives both night and day - He certainly does! There is never a time when God is not working! In us and for us. But the darkness stops us. It diminishes our sight. It minimizes our control. It puts our senses on alert. We are weak, not strong. In darkness, we live by faith. Darkness is the time of the cross.

And so we heard tonight of Jacob. You remember him. Isaac and Rebekah's son, twin brother of Esau. He thought he was in control. And up until this point in his life, he usually was; and he usually got what he wanted. First it was Esau's birthright,

then it was his blessing. Then it was his wife Rachel, and then great riches from his Uncle Laban. Jacob was a “daylight,” take charge, kind of guy!

And so Jacob needed the darkness where God is. He needed the cross. And so that night by the Jabbok. He is alone. Esau is hot on his tail – seeking revenge, he thinks. And so things are looking pretty bleak, pretty dark; and so it is the perfect time for God to work on Jacob. And so, a wrestling match. To turn Jacob’s world upside down. *Or actually, to turn it right side up!* And no short, easy match was this – Jacob wrestled all night with God. With the God who wanted to be wrestled with. The God who wants to be found. The God who doesn’t crush Jacob under His thumb (although He could have!), but lets him prevail, that He might bless him.

And when the morning comes, Jacob is not unaffected. He is changed. He is no longer Jacob, *the man in charge*; but now Israel, *God’s chosen one*. He leaves damaged by the encounter, limping. But he is better for it – no longer able to rely on himself, he must rely on God. On grace. On a deliverance not of his own doing, but of God’s doing. And so he is stronger. Not with any strength of his own, or some increased strength after a spiritual workout – but with real strength; God’s strength. And now he knows: the God of his grandfather Abraham, and the God of his father Isaac, is yes, *his God*.

The darkness has prepared Jacob for the day.

And so too for you – you who also wrestle with God in *your* lives. In the darkness where God is. In the crosses He places on you. In order not to crush you, but to bless you. You who do not deserve such grace and favor – but that’s what makes it grace. The undeserved goodness of God. The God who comes to turn you right side up from the upside-downness of your sin. The God who comes to release you from your preoccupation with yourself. The God who comes to free you from the tyrants of this world, that you may live in Him. That you may live by faith.

The darkness where God is.

And so we heard with Jesus on His cross. *Darkness filled the whole land*. And not just an eclipse, a *darkening* – but what did Luke tell us? *The sun’s light failed*. It was a darkness deeper than ever there was, for the work of God more important than ever

there was. The mightiest work of God when He looked His weakest. His conquering when He looked conquered.

But then after that darkness, there was the dawning of the first day. The first day of the week and the morning and light of the resurrection. And because of *Jesus' wrestling*, for us, with the powers and principalities of this world, with our enemies, with sin, Satan, death, and hell – He is not changed, **but we are!** For this work of God was His work for you, and in you. You who have been baptized into His death, and raised with Him in His resurrection. And so your death defeated, your sin forgiven, and your life turned right side up again. That the darkness of sin be ended, and you now live in the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 4:6)

And the day is coming when we will live in that light forever. The natural cycle of this life will be ended. . . . But that time has not yet come. You have it in the promise of God already now, but we cannot demand it now. We cannot demand all light and no darkness, or try to determine the time or shape or way of its appearance. Then it would no longer be of grace and promise, but of obligation and contract.

But we have no contract with God. No, if *You* do this then *I'll* do that. Our faith is no game of “Deal or No Deal.” No, promises freely given are freely and amazingly delivered by the God who made them. In His Son . . . and His cross . . . and the crosses He places on us. Even if we, for now, (like Jacob) may have to limp a little through this life.

But that makes us not weaker but stronger. Not less certain but more certain. And enables us to sing with the psalmist (even in the darkness!): *Let [us] thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men!* (Ps 107)

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