

28 March 2007
Lent 5 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Strange Glory”

Text: John 12:27-36 (Isaiah 45:15-25)

God moves in a mysterious way. (LSB #765) Indeed. That is what we have been considering this Lenten season.

That God hides.

He comes at unexpected times and hours.

That God delays.

God has a mind of His own (that often disagrees with ours!).

He works in opposites, hiding His grace under wrath, and His gifts under troubles.

God has disguises and masks.

And that this is the theology of the cross. That whatever God does, wills, thinks, or is *in Himself* is not ours to know. We know Him only in how He chooses to reveal Himself to us; in His relationship with us; or, in what He promises and gives.

And this is good.

For the will and wisdom of God exceeds the reason and comprehension of our small and sinful minds.

Yet He *wants* us to know Him, and trust Him. And though the ways He reveals Himself to us may seem strange and mysterious, they are genuine.

If we are disappointed, perhaps it is because we are trying to make God in our own image. That He be not the God He is, but the God we want Him to be. A big, shiny, glamorous, powerful, classy God. Doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Giving to us what we cannot get for ourselves.

But would we *love* such a God? Or simply *use* Him?

The Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard likened this to the prince of a land pursuing his beloved. The prince used the disguise of a peasant to woo her. While never ceasing to be a prince, he hid his identity – so that she would love him for who he was and not for the office he occupied.

Is it so too with God? If power and beauty are only skin deep, is that why the theology of so many in our day and age is “a mile wide and an inch deep?” Chasing after God for what He can do for me, instead of who He is for me?

But it is the cross that stops that kind of theology in its tracks. The cross of weakness and shame. The cross of defeat and death. The question is: will we turn from this cross and chase after other gods who will give us what we think we want? Or will we turn to this cross and see on it the God who gives all for His beloved? **For you.**

That kind of God you cannot use. But Him you can love. The God who reveals Himself to us in Jesus, and Jesus who reveals Himself to us through the *Strange Glory* of the cross.

And it's that *Strange Glory* that the crowd that day in Jerusalem couldn't figure out. They were looking for glory *as they knew it* – in strength, in power, in vast numbers of fans, and popularity. So when Jesus then speaks of the cross – His *lifting up from the earth* – they don't get it. How can that be glory? It's **gory**, but not glory!

And yet, Jesus says, that is when and where *He will draw all people to Himself*. Where He will be glorious. For there we will see Him as He is. Not as we *want* Him to be – but as He *is*. For there, on the cross, He is the light.

The light revealing the full extent of the sin of the world and the sin in us. For He takes all of that sin upon Himself and receives its due penalty.

But also the light revealing the full extent of the love of God for us. *For He takes all of that sin upon Himself and receives its due penalty!*

And so by this light, we see all that is true. About ourselves and about God, that we may walk in this light in both repentance and faith. Repenting of all that we are, and living by faith in all that He is. Repenting of trying to use God for our own ends, and living by faith in His work for us. His work both upon His own cross, and in the crosses He lays upon us.

This is *Strange Glory* because it is the opposite of how we usually think. For our utilitarian world teaches us that what we *do* is more important than who we *are*, and therefore those who do the most, or contribute the most, are the most glorious.

But not so with God. Your value and worth lies not in what you do, but in who you are in Christ. *What Christ has done is the glory of Christians*. My life is not what I have done, what I am doing, or what I shall do. It is not I, but Christ. His life for me, His forgiveness for me, His grace and mercy for me. The glory of His cross.

And this is *Strange Glory*, but why should we expect otherwise? From Isaiah to John to us today, Christ is calling us out of our flattened and familiar, our comfortable and careful Christianity, to the *strange glory* of the cross. To live a *cruciform* life. That dying with Him, we live with Him; and suffering with Him, we reign with Him. (2 Tim 2) Enslaved not to the things of this world and its idea of glory, but bound to the One who gave His life for me. Living for Him in the same self-sacrificing way He lives for us.

These things the world considers unimportant, useless, even embarrassing. And yet how powerful this *strange glory* in a world dark with sin!

The *strange glory* of the Holy One becoming sin, the One who is Life dying, and the Lover of men being the most despised.

The *strange glory* of the Creator serving His creatures; the Greater serving the lesser.

The *strange glory* that God would not only love sinners like you and me, but die to save us!

That we may be His own. His beloved. That we may *know* Him. And believe. For He wants nothing else. Only to give us His glory, through the *strange glory* of the cross. For there is no other God. And there is no other way.

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