

16 March 2008  
Palmarum / Passion Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Holy War”

Text: Matthew 27:11-66; Philippians 2:5-11

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

*Jihad*. Holy war. Up until about seven years ago, you probably didn't know that word. But now you do. Now you know it well. For it is not just a word, but a reality. And hearing it probably sends chills down your spine. Because it is used by those who say they are fighting for God. It used by those who take up weapons of war and murder in order to make God the king of this world. It is used by those who see the war for holiness as a war that we fight for *God*.

But it is today, and all this holy week, that we again hear about the *real* jihad. The real holy war. That it is not a war that we fight for God, but that God fights for us. A war fought not with conventional weapons, but with spiritual weapons against a spiritual foe. For as St. Paul said, “*we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* (Eph 6:12)

And so this holy war would have to be fought with an unconventional weapon. With a weapon, in fact, that looked more like defeat than victory: **a cross**. And victory would not come by putting our foe on that cross, but by our king being nailed to it, after He is betrayed, tried, convicted, beaten, and humiliated.

Does that jihad sends chills down your spine? It should. Perhaps it has become too familiar to us. And so it is good that we enter this holy week, to hear and remember again. To hear and remember not just the work of our Saviour, but His love. For this jihad is not fought out of hatred, but out of love. And so we call this Sunday not only Palm Sunday, but the Sunday of the Passion. And we call Jesus' crucifixion for us His Passion. Because we see there God's passion for us. His obsessive, driven, love that causes Him to come and fight for us. To come and die for us. For this is a holy war only He could win. **A holy war fought by the Holy One, so that we who**

**are unholy might be holy.**

You know that . . . and so the question is: *why do we keep trying to fight this war?* Why do we think we can win this war of holiness, with our own strength, our own wisdom, our own efforts, our own weapons? Thinking that we can conquer our sin, if only we try hard enough. Thinking that we can build the Church, if only we use the right methods. Thinking that we can make God the king of this nation, or the king of this world. Yes, just like the crowds of disciples that welcomed Jesus that day into Jerusalem, with visions of worldly grandeur and political success.

Now, to be sure, there is a place for us to join in this fight of faith. Indeed, we are not wholly passive spectators. But if you want to fight in this holy war, you must use His weapon, not yours; His method, not yours; His way, not yours. And what is that? St. Paul told us: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

For dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this holy war is still one that is fought *for* us. It's not that Jesus did His part back then, and now it's up to us to do our part now. No. If we are to fight, it is still Jesus fighting for us. If we are to win, it is still Jesus' victory for us. And so we fight not by rising up, but by making ourselves nothing, by serving, by humbling ourselves, and yes, even by dying for others. By giving up our life, our time, our energy, our will, for them. Most unconventional weapons, are they not? But that is to have the mind of Christ.

And that's hard, isn't it? It's much easier to wield the conventional weapons of our own power and wisdom and strength. Our anger and temper and indignation. Our reason and arguments and politics. They look stronger. They make more sense to us. To have the mind of Christ goes against the grain. It doesn't come naturally.

And so the jihad, before it can be fought *by* us, must first be fought *in* us. And continually fought in us. For us who are unholy in sin. For us whose sin is like a weed that no matter how many times you pull it, you just cannot kill. For us who like to fix our eyes on ourselves instead of on Christ.

And so not just on Palm Sunday, for us today our Saviour comes, riding to us in the

humble and lowly waters of Holy Baptism. And it is *a victorious jihad* every time a sinner is given new life, washed clean from the inside out, and given faith. For in those waters the devil is driven out, and the ground of another heart is claimed for the Lord.

For us today our Saviour comes, riding in the humble and lowly words of Holy Scripture. And it is *a victorious jihad* every time those words take root and grow in our hearts, bear fruit, and work in us the mind of Christ. For in those words the devil is driven out, and the ground of another mind is claimed for the Lord.

For us today our Saviour comes, riding in the humble and lowly words of forgiveness. And it is *a victorious jihad* every time we fall on our knees in repentance and those words of life lift us up in blessing and life. For in those words the devil is driven out, and the ground of another will is claimed for the Lord.

And for us today our Saviour comes, riding in the humble and lowly bread and wine of His Holy Supper. And it is *a victorious jihad* every time we eat His body and drink His blood, the life of God is given to us, and we are strengthened in forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. For in that meal the devil is driven out, and the ground of another life is claimed for the Lord.

And so still today, as on the cross, the war *is* being won. By our God who comes and fights for us. If you don't see it or feel it, that doesn't mean it isn't real. The devil, who has been stripped of his power in our Saviour's victorious jihad, now wants to deceive you into thinking the news of his defeat was premature. For just look around in our world and in you – at all the evil, all the sin, all the strife, all the death – *who is really the victorious one?* . . . It looked that way on Good Friday too, when Jesus breathed His last. But our foe *was* defeated, as Jesus used satan's most fearsome weapon against him – using death to defeat death. And then opening His tomb, *and yours*, in victory. The peace and life of Easter morning signaling that the jihad was over.

Now our Lord is giving that victory of the cross through His Church. Through you. Do you see evil in the world? It is an opportunity for you to fight, by forgiving. Do you see strife? It is an opportunity for you to fight, by serving. Do you see death? It is an opportunity for you to fight, by proclaiming the victory of the cross. Do you see hatred? It is an opportunity for you to fight, by loving. And in these lowly, humble, and despised ways, to have the mind of Christ, and be imitators of Him.

For still in these ways, He is winning the jihad, bringing His holiness and life to an unholy and dead world.

That is what this week is all about. This Holy Week, this Passion Week. *The Lamb goes uncomplaining forth.* (LSB #438) For you, He goes, for you. In His passionate, obsessive, driven love. That on the last day, when every knee bows and every tongue confesses, we may not fear, but join in welcoming Him with joy and singing: “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*”

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 faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.