

20 March 2008  
Holy Maundy Thursday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

### “Conflict Resolution”

Text: Matthew 26:17-30 (Exodus 24:3-11; Hebrews 9:11-22)

In the years that I have been a pastor, I have seen the continued and consistent attacks and assaults of satan against the children of God. Though our congregation is small, the problems and troubles, issues and fears, are many. Satan is working night and day, attacking from within, and attacking from without, taking no breaks so that you have no rest. He wants to destroy you. He wants to drive you to despair. He wants no less than total victory over you and your soul. And he is a foe to take seriously. So do not think that you are the only one. The only one in this congregation that is having problems and struggles. It is all of us. For some it may be physical, for some spiritual, and for some both. Perhaps some hide it better than others. Perhaps some are stronger in the face of attacks than others. But no one is exempt. Whether you are young or old, rich or poor, married or single, male or female – satan is an equal opportunity molester.

So it was also for the disciples that night. None with a clear conscience, but each one asking “*Is it I?*” Each one with their own doubts and fears. Each one would run away and abandon their Lord later that night. And although Judas is the great betrayer and Peter the great denier, each one would deny and betray in their own way. Each one failing in their faith, and failing in their love.

And yet in this life, although *all* disciples are under attack and fall in many and various ways, in reality we do not have *many* problems, *many* issues, and *many* troubles. We really have but one: **sin**. It is the sin that dwells **in** you, that flows **from** you, and that comes crashing down **upon** you from your fellow sinners, that wreaks havoc with your life. It is sin that causes doubts and fears, that creates division, that makes us harbor resentment, that turns us selfish and self-centered, that induces us to see the worst in others, that compels us to exalt and excuse ourselves in pride, to betray those we should love, to lash out in hurtful words and deeds, and that causes us to be less than what our good and gracious God has created us to be. It is this sin that causes our issues. It is this sin that the problems in our lives makes worse. It is this sin that is the real cancer in our lives, that if left

unchecked consumes us and results in eternal separation from God and condemnation. Whether we are disciples of the first – or twenty-first – century.

And so Jesus came not to treat the symptoms, but to get after the disease. Treating symptoms has its time and place, but is not the answer. It cannot be. That is why we fail when we resolve to do better. That is why when we solve one problem, another pops up in its place. That is why the plastic surgery of covering up our sin may make us look better for a while, while inside we are dying.

And so tonight, the great physician of body and soul gives His disciples – *of all times* – what we need. For here as we eat His body and drink His blood, believing these words: “*given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin*” – we have exactly what those words say. (Small Catechism, How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?) This is no placebo – an empty pill filled with sugar; empty bread and wine filled with good and sugary feelings. No, **is means is**. Our Lord does not lie, and on this night of His betrayal, when in mere hours He will be arrested and hung on the cross, He says what He means, and He gives what we need. The early church fathers would call it the “*medicine of immortality*,” for while it does not solve all the problems in our lives, it is the remedy for the problem. Bypassing the symptoms, it attacks the cause of it all – our sin.

And so Jesus took the bread. *This is My body*. He took the wine. *This is My blood, poured out for you*. Yes, poured out, like the blood of the old covenant. But also not like the old covenant! For this was not the blood of bulls and goats, but the blood of God. Poured out not upon an altar of stone, but upon the altar of the cross. Sprinkled not on the outside of His disciples, but given them to drink, to sprinkle their hearts. And the promise here given was not to provide an earthly inheritance, or promised land, but an eternal one. An eternal kingdom and salvation, an eternal place of rest and peace. This was the fulfillment of the old, and the ushering in of the new. From now on, things would never be the same again.

For how could they be the same? How could *you* be the same when in Holy Baptism you are joined to Christ and now named in His will, an inheritor of all His life and promises? How could you be the same after eating His body and drinking His blood, the life and forgiveness of God given to you? How could you be the same, knowing that the Son of God hangs on the cross, for you, with your sin, that you may live? Indeed you are not the same. **You are forgiven**. You are a child of God. You are a new creation.

But as a new creation living in an old, sin-filled world and body, there is (as you well know) conflict. Maybe a lot. Conflict outside of you and around you, and conflict within you. And in this conflict, sometimes you will stand – often, you will fall. At times you will be strong – often, you will be weak. And so Jesus, when He gave this gift of His Supper, told us to “*Do this in remembrance of Me,*” which literally means, *keep doing this*. As often as you do this. For He knows we need it. Not once in a while, or sometimes, but all the time. We need His forgiveness, His strength, His life, His resurrection. To be given us not only in the end, but already here and now. What Jesus would accomplish with His body and blood on the cross, is here given us in the body and blood of His Supper. That as often as we repent and receive, we are raised from the death of sin to life. A foretaste of the life and feast to come.

And for frightened and troubled disciples, on that Thursday of the first Holy Week, that was exactly what they needed. And for all the frightened and troubled disciples here, on the Thursday of this Holy Week, this is exactly what we need as well.

So come now and receive this forgiveness, life, and salvation. Come now, eat His body and drink His blood. Come now, for He has come – tonight – *for you*.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.