

1 April 2009
Lent 5 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Wound of Abandonment”

Text: Matthew 27:35-50 (Jeremiah 30:10-24; Hebrews 11:32 - 12:3)

Betrayal, apathy, denial, mockery.

All our sins on Him were laid.

The betrayal of Judas, the apathy of the sleeping disciples, the denial of Peter, the mockery of the soldiers, and more. Much more.

All the sins of all the people of all the world of all times. All people who ever lived, who live now, and who have not yet even been born.

Your sins and my sins, laid on Jesus. Not one excepted.

The sins (as we confessed on Ash Wednesday) of our present and our past.

Sins of the soul and sins of the body.

The sins which we have done to please ourselves and the sins we have done to please others.

Our careless sins, our idle sins, our serious sins, our deliberate sins.

The sin we know, the sins we've forgotten about, and the sins we don't even know we've committed.

Sins of thought, word, deed, and desire.

Jesus takes them all. They are given, or imputed, to Him, to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament scapegoat, driven into the desert with the sins of the people, never to return. To be the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial lambs, who shed their blood for the atonement of sins - stand-ins, or substitutes, for the people whose blood it should have been.

And so is He wounded. Physically, yes. Spiritually, yes.

He hangs on the cross, suspended between heaven and earth, that He might bring heaven and earth back together again.

That by His wounds we might be healed.

Healed of our sin, our death, our captivity, and be sons of God.

Therefore this last, and greatest wound.

“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”

Jesus is abandoned, forsaken, by His Father.

For this is the end result of sin. Sin which says no to God. Sin which is cutting ourselves off from God. Sin which is a deliberate turning away from the truth, from goodness, from heaven. Sin which says, *“Leave me alone, God! To go my own way, to do my own will. Let me be.”*

We *think* that's what we want, what would make us happy. But we have no idea how horrible that would be, should God leave us.

But Jesus knows. Bearing our sin, He gets what our sins demand and deserve. He is forsaken and abandoned.

How this can be, we must admit, is a deep and profound mystery.

But that it happened, we must confess . . . and rejoice.

That our Saviour tasted hell for us; the utter and profound isolation and aloneness of sin. For that's what sin does - it separates, it isolates. It is the very opposite of a God who is Triune.

And so folks who joke about hell and think it's going to be a party with a lot of people who like to have fun - well, they're dead wrong.

Hell is this utter aloneness and isolation.

Hell is hungering and thirsting for a human touch.

Hell has no one to share your misery; no one to relieve your aloneness.

Sin says "*Leave me alone!*" . . . and hell is God leaving you alone. Forever.

Ponder that, and you will begin to plumb the depths of Jesus' cry of forsakenness this night.

Ponder that, and you will bow in love before your Saviour, whose love for you was so great, that He took this awful abandonment in your place, that you be set free from it. That you *never* have to be alone. Never.

And so by His wounds we have been healed.

Our sin atoned for, we have a gracious, merciful, and loving God, who will not leave us alone - even when that means discipline, correction, or training for us.

Even when it seems as if God does not see, or know, or care - we have Jesus' promise that He does.

That as He told Jeremiah: "***I am with you to save you, declares the Lord.***"

Or consider the example of the great cloud of witnesses we heard of in Hebrews - Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel - never alone.

And not just them, but a countless number of others, whose names we do not know, some who lived in the past and some who live even now - tortured, being mocked and flogged, in chains and in prison. Those who are stoned, beheaded, sawn in two, or killed with the sword. Those rejected by men, sent into exile, poor, whose homes have been taken away. They were not alone. Though all the world leave them, their Saviour did not.

For He is the faithful Good Shepherd, who sees His flock through the valley of the shadow of death. Note that well: He doesn't say He will lead us *around* it, but *through* it. Yet even though we "***walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we fear no evil***" - why? - "***for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.***" (Psalm 23:4)

What joy then is ours! That we will never have to know what Jesus went through for us in those darkest hours; in that forsakenness and abandonment.

Whatever we are going through in this life - whatever suffering, or pain, or

loneliness, or separation, or desolation, or disaster - we face nothing alone.
For hell is undone, death is destroyed, our sin is forgiven, in Jesus.
Yes, by His wounds - by *this* wound - we are healed and restored as sons of God in
the Son of God.
We who were far off have been brought near.
The darkness has become the light.
And the arms once stretched wide on the wood of the cross have become the gate
to heaven.

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