

3 March 2010
Lent 2 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Frogs and Gnats”

Text: Exodus 8:1-19; 1 Corinthians 15:35-49; Passion Harmony, Part 2

In the first plague, when the Lord turned the water of the Nile to blood, the fish died and, we are told, *it stank*. And if you've ever smelled even one dead and rotting fish, you can imagine the stench that all those fish much have created! In all of Egypt, you couldn't get away from it. No matter where you went, there was the odor. The odor of the plague.

In the second plague, it happened again. God caused frogs to come up on the land of Egypt, so that they were everywhere - in your bed, bath, and beyond! In your kitchen, in your pots and pans, your sock drawer, your shoes, everywhere. That's a lot of frogs! And when God heard the prayer of Moses to end this plague, the frogs didn't just go back to where they came from - they died. Right where they were. Right in your house. And they gathered them in heaps - if they could even find them all in all the nooks and crannies. *And they stank*. And if the stench of the fish wasn't enough to make you sick, add dead and rotting frogs to the stew, and Egypt was probably the last place on earth you'd want to be!

But the stench that permeated the land of Egypt in those days wasn't just the stench of death, but the stench of sin. The stench of Pharaoh's hard heart. The stench of rebellion. The stench of idolatry. The stench of evil. The stench that fills God's nostrils, rising not only from the land of Egypt, but also from you and me. There's a reason why we say things like: *I smell a rat*. Sin stinks. And so, you'd think, this stinkin', sin-filled earth is probably the last place God would want to be!

But no. He came. The Son of God came into our world and to us who are rotting and dead in our sins, that His sacrifice on the cross be a sweet-smelling aroma to God. A sweet-smelling aroma to cover our stench and remove our sin and death. For if sin stinks, it is the sacrifice of faith that smells sweet (cf. 2 Cor 2:14-16). That's why over 30 times in the books of Leviticus and Numbers, we hear that the sacrifices offered to God are a “sweet-smelling aroma.” It's not because burning dead animals smelled particularly good - it is because these were sacrifices of faith. Faith in God, faith in His promises, faith in His Christ. And by such faith, God doesn't smell a sinful rat - He smells a forgiven son.

And it is the next plague, the third plague, that points us to this wonderful sin-forgiving, death-abolishing, life-giving work of God in Christ for us. For from the

dust of the earth God brings forth the next plague - gnats. And it is this plague that the Egyptians magicians and all their satanic arts *cannot* mimic. Because only God can create life. Only God can bring life from dust.

And so in the beginning, God created Adam from the dust. And then we heard on Ash Wednesday that, because of sin, *dust we are and to dust we will return*. But we hear today that God is able to bring forth life from the dust again. And from the dust of death He will bring us forth, as we heard from St. Paul. Now, we bear the image of the man of dust, but by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, we also bear the image of God. His image lost in sin, now restored in forgiveness. The stench of death, now replaced with the aroma of life.

As Jesus' time grew short in the Garden of Gethsemane and He faced the terrible stench of sin and death, He was in sorrow, turmoil, and agony. Greater than we can imagine. Our sins greater than the heaps of frogs in Egypt. Yet He intercedes for us; willingly He goes to death, a sacrifice of faith, in our place, becoming sin for us, that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21). And so we are. Caiaphas was right: ***it was expedient that one man die for the people***. And so Jesus died, that we might live, and offer ourselves now as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), sweet smelling and acceptable to God through faith in Christ Jesus.

And so during this season of Lent, as we ponder the work of our Lord Jesus for us and for our salvation, offer this sacrifice - the sacrifice of faith. A living sacrifice of one whose sin is forgiven, whose stench is covered, and whose death is defeated. A living sacrifice of one who is a slave no more, but now a child of God.

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

Office Hymn: "Lord, You Are Our Deliverer"
Tune: King's Lynn (LSB #517)

- 1 Lord, You are our Deliverer,
our only hope and stay
against our cruel oppressor
when we in bondage lay.
You came in meekness lowly
to crush the serpent's head,
to free us from our slavery
and raise to life the dead.

- 2 Our God, at His creating
brought forth from dust a man.
Yet man in his rebellion
to dust will turn again.
From dusty death the Finger
of God will life forth bring,
for Christ, to life, has risen
and death has lost its sting.

- 3 Then homage let us give to God,
the Father, Spirit, Son.
The same today and ever,
th'eternal Three in One.
Who saved us from our Egypt
and slavery to sin,
that we may live in freedom
and heaven for us win.