

17 March 2010
Lent 4 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Hail, Locusts, and Darkness”

Text: Exodus 9:13-10:29; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11; Passion Harmony, Part 4

Pharaoh and Pilate had a lot in common.

First, they both thought they were in control. They both thought they had the power to either free or hold God’s chosen ones. They could not see that all power and authority comes from God alone. They were both living in the darkness of sin.

Second, both would not listen to those around them. Pharaoh’s servants said to him, **“Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?”** Pilate’s wife said to him, **“Do not have anything to do with that man.”** But no, they didn’t understand. For they were both living in the darkness of sin, which deafens your ears.

And third, both had a chance to release God’s chosen ones - but they do not. They *cannot*. For when you are living in the darkness of sin, you do not control sin, sin controls you. And so both Pharaoh and Pilate are controlled - by fear, by pride, and by the lust for power. Yet not only them - how often do you and I do the same?

And the One who is in control, the One who does understand all things, the One who is *completely free* and controlled only by love, is the One standing whipped and beaten and in bondage; the One with a crown of thorns on His head; the One who is condemned to death. He comes and takes our place, that we might have His place. He comes and serves, that we may be free to serve. He comes, that we may see. To enlighten our darkness by the light of His cross. That we may see our sin. That we may see our bondage. That we may see how sin controls us. And that we may see there is One who is greater than all this.

And so that they may see, God sends hail upon Egypt, **“so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.”** So that they may see, He sends the locusts, **“that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson . . . what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord.”** And then so that they may see, He sends the darkness. A darkness that could be *felt*. A darkness so dark that, we are told, no one could **rise from his place for three days**.

But at the end of three days, there was rising - there was resurrection! The three days of darkness is Egypt points us to the three day rest of Jesus in the darkness of death and the grave, that at the end of those days, He shatter the darkness with the

light and life of His resurrection. And so He has. For as St. Paul told us tonight, we are children of light. Not of the darkness, but of the light.

And so we have been set free - free to serve, free to love, free to live. To live in the kingdom of Christ, which is not of this world.

And so do not wash our hands of guilt like Pilate, but wash in the water of Baptism, that our guilt be truly taken away.

And we do not repent like Pharaoh, so that the plagues will go away; so that we will get what we want in this world, but so that we will have life in the world to come.

And we pray that ***His blood be on us and on our children***, for His blood cleanses us from all sin, and give us His life; everlasting life.

That for us, as for Jesus, death be but sleep. That as we fall asleep in this life, we too will awaken and arise from the darkness of death, into the glorious light of His kingdom.

And so during this season of Lent, as we ponder the work of our Lord Jesus for us and for our salvation, see in Jesus and His Word the light that enlightens your darkness, your heart, and your way. That we may encourage one another with these words, as we continue our journey from the Egypt of our sin to the Promised Land of heaven.

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 When darkness came upon the land,
Pharaoh's heart was darkest still.

Yet light for Israel beameth,
according to His will.
Now from the cross forth shineth
the everlasting light,
that we from depths of sin and death,
arise from error's night.

- 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.