

28 March 2010
Palmarum / Passion Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Love of Power, or the Power of Love”

Text: Deuteronomy 32:36-39; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 22-23

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

The Word of God through the mouth of Moses said this to us today:

For the Lord will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free. . . .

When He sees that their power is gone.

Take a moment and consider that.

We don't like to be powerless, to be not in control, to be unable to do something.

We rebel against such statements, and try to assert our power in any way we can.

How much has life become a power play?

At work, at school, at home, in groups of friends.

Children try to assert their power through shouting or throwing tantrums.

Adults, maybe in that way also (!), but for them, how often is power exerted through silence until the other gives in?

And in a whole host of ways, we manipulate others to get what we want.

To be in control. At least in some small way.

I may not be the top dog, but at least *someone's* under me.

Someone I can control.

And tell what to do.

To have some power.

When He sees that their power is gone.

So that's not true about you, is it?

But should it be?

But pastor, I don't want to be at the bottom of the pecking order!

True enough; neither do I.

But why not?

Don't think too hard about that; the answer is easy: sin.

Sin that does not want to serve, but to be served.

Sin that wants to exert power over others.

Sin that wants to be in control.

Besides, no matter how powerless you are, no matter how low, no matter how tired and weak and piled upon, you will *never* be at the bottom of the pecking order. That spot is reserved for one person: **Jesus**.

“[T]hough he was in the form of God, [He] 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.”

We heard that story again today; and we'll hear it this Holy Week. The Son of God become nothing, all the way to the bottom of the pecking order - **for you**. To serve you. To save you.

For truly, we are powerless.
We cannot save ourselves.
Like Israel in slavery to Egypt, we are in bondage to sin.
We've fallen, and we can't get up.

And so our Lord came.
As He rescue His powerless people from their bondage to the Egyptians, so He has rescued us from our bondage to sin and death.
And if you think His power against Egypt was great, in truth, His power on the cross was greater.
For the cross shows us not the power of man, but the power of God.
The power of His love.

And so for you, He is arrested and does not fight back.
For you He is punched and mocked and abused.
For you He is humiliated.
For you He is hung on a cross like a criminal.
For you He lays down His life.
To serve you. To save you.

So that we know, as Moses continues and says: ***See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me.***

Truly, there is no other God like this.
Who comes to serve the sinner, the rebel.
Who comes to be shamed, to take our shame away.
Who comes to take our sin and death, and give us forgiveness and life.

There is no other God like this.
Who still today is coming and saving - washing, absolving, feeding.
Still coming to those who are powerless, to give us what we do not have and
cannot achieve:

 forgiveness, life, and salvation.
To break the grip of death on you.
To end the reign of sin in your life.
To raise you up, no matter how far down you are.

All this He has done for you.
Not starting when He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, but when He rode into this
world in the womb of the Virgin.
And not ending when He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven - no, not
ending until you rise and ascend with Him.
For He did not come to return alone; He came for you.
Taking your place here, that you may have His place there.

Until then: ***Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.***
What mind is that?
That has now be given to you?
Which is yours in Christ Jesus?
The mind to know that true power is exercised not in control and manipulation, but
in service and love.
Not because you have to, but because you can.
Because no matter how far down you go, you will never be at the bottom.
That spot is still reserved for one person: **Jesus.**
The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
Take a moment and consider *that*.

Whatever you were, whatever you are, in Christ Jesus you are made new.
The same power of Christ that laid down His life for you, now working in you.
That not your sin but His love,
 not your sin, but His forgiveness,
 not your sin, but His life,
control you, and lead you, and guide you.
At work, at school, at home, in groups of friends.

For we call this Holy Week not just because of the holy things that happened,
or because of the Holy One they happened to -
 but because this is the week *that makes you holy.*
Holy, because your sins are forgiven.
Holy, because you have been raised to a new life.
Holy, because the Body and Blood of the Holy One is here given to you.

And so today we enter this Holy Week.
We begin it with Hosanna! Lord, save us!
We will end it with Alleluia! For He has.
It is finished, He said.
And truly, it is.

So today as we enter this Holy Week, ***have this mind among yourselves.***
And let us cease our love of power, and see and know once again this week the
power of His love.

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.