

31 March 2010  
Holy Wednesday  
Service of Corporate Confession  
and Individual Absolution

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“No Greater Love”

Text: John 13:6-38; Romans 5:6-11

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

Tonight we heard of when Jesus meets with His disciples in the upper room.

Who are these disciples?

One is a betrayer, one is a denier, one is a doubter, and the rest will run away in fear when Jesus is arrested.

Jesus knows who they are. They cannot hide their sins.

He knows their hearts, their plans, their shortcomings and fears.

Yet He loves them so. Even Judas.

He does not love them because of who they are. For they are, quite frankly, often frustrating and unloveable.

No, He does not love them because of who they are; He loves them because of who He is.

Because He is the God of love, who has come to lay down His life in love, for sinners like them.

Well, in the same way, our Lord meets with us here, in this room, tonight.

With us who are betrayers, deniers, doubters, and worse.

Jesus knows who you are. You cannot hide your sins.

He knows your heart, your plans, your shortcomings, and your fears.

Yet He loves you so.

He does not love you because of who you are. For you are, quite frankly, often frustrating and unloveable.

No, He does not love you because of who you are - or what you will be - He loves you because of who He is.

Because He is the God of love, who has come and laid down his life in love, for sinners like you and me.

And that love is what the season of Lent - and especially what this Holy Week - is all about. A love undeserved. A love greater than we can imagine. That love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus.

And so tonight we gathered here with Him in confession.  
Not because He needs your confession - for He already knows your heart, your plans, your failures and fears.  
He knows them better than you.  
No, we gather here with Him in confession because we need this confession.  
To recognize again who we are and what we have done and failed to do, and to receive His love.

His love for sinners.

His love given to us in those words: *I forgive you all your sins.*

For truly there is no greater love than that.

Oh, we may want Him to show us His love in other ways - by giving us the things of this world that we want, or by making our lives happier or easier.

But just as puppy love grows into a deeper, more mature love,  
so too do we see that the love of God is deeper and greater  
than our puppy love for the things of this world and life.

His love transcends those things, and the glory of His cross makes those things pale in comparison.

And so as we confess and loose our grip on these things,

His forgiveness and love increases its grip on us.

The forgiveness and love of the cross.

The love that even though Judas has lifted his heel against Jesus in betrayal, Jesus does not lift His heel against Judas - no, His heel will instead come down upon Satan.

The love that even though Peter will deny Jesus, Jesus will not deny Peter.

And the love that even though you and I betray and deny our Saviour with our sinful and rebellious thoughts, words, deeds, and desires, He will not forsake us.

No, it is instead as St. Paul told us tonight: ***God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

Which means Christ will love us to death, and He will love us to life.

That dying and rising with Him, through the death of confession and the resurrection of absolution, we receive His love and live that love.

For that is now our privilege.

To, as Jesus said: ***love one another, just as [He] has loved us.***

Which remember, is a love which loves not because of who the other person is, or because they deserve it -

but which loves because of our Saviour is;

and because of who we now are in Christ:

Children of God, new creations, sinners made saints.

And so if we find that love is lacking in our life,  
if we find ourselves stuck in the same old ways,  
    with the same old desires,  
    and the same old sins,  
the answer is not to buck up and try harder - but to confess, and receive His  
    forgiveness and love.  
His forgiveness and love that make us new, and give us new lives to live.

And so what Jesus is telling His disciples in the upper room that night - and us  
    gathered in this room this night - is that the cross is really a love story.  
The story of God's love for sinners.  
The love story that started in Eden with God's promise to Adam and Eve.  
The love story that reached its climax on Calvary, as Jesus laid down His life for  
    sinners - for you and me.  
The love story that continues today, as the fruits of the cross now given to us, bear  
    fruits of love in our lives.  
The love story that is not about our love and commitment to God, but His love and  
    commitment to us in Jesus.

**So *now is the Son of Man glorified.***

Glorified, as Jesus takes our sin and goes to the cross.  
Glorified, for on the cross He will show us a glory and love unimaginable.  
Glorified, for this is His glory: to lay down His life for you.

Let us now see this love these next three days.  
This love given and shed for you.  
This love hung for you.  
This love that rested in the tomb for you.

That the end of His journey be the end of ours as well - that we will be with Him in  
Paradise.

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