

2 April 2010
Great and Holy Friday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Thank God It’s Friday!”

Thank God it’s Friday.
Thank God it’s Good Friday.
For this is the day that changed the world forever.
For when the Creator dies for His creatures,
 when the Holy One dies for sinners,
 when the Shepherd dies for sheep who love to wander,
 when the Author of life offers His life for the life of the world,
how can things ever be the same again?
Indeed, they cannot.
Everything is changed, and in Him, you are changed.

Yes, you are changed, for tonight, as we remember Jesus’ death, it is not just that Jesus dies, *it is that you too die*. That is the meaning of Holy Baptism. That in those waters your sins are washed away, yes; and you are enlightened with the gift of the Holy Spirit, yes; but also, you are joined to Jesus in His death and resurrection. He takes you into Himself, that you die and rise with Him. So that His Good Friday becomes your Good Friday. His victory, your victory. And so you be changed, and live a new life.

The service tonight didn’t start with that note of victory, though. It began with the Reproaches - those haunting words: *What have I done to you, O My people?* He who came to save, who is the Giver of all good gifts, is met with rejection and scorn. The rejection and scorn of sin. For all sin, no matter how small or large, is a rejection of God and a scorning of His Word, His will, and His life. And so of this, we too are guilty. Of taking of His goodness, and scourging Him in return; of giving Him gall in return; of yielding bad grapes in return. *O My people!*

Yet how does our Lord respond? We will hear again soon.

First, He speaks a word of forgiveness. For that is our greatest need. He gives not scorn for scorn, but mercy to us who have lost our way; grace to us who have rebelled; and forgiveness to remove the millstone of sin from around our necks. **Father, forgive them.** Those words are meant for you.

Second, He speaks a word of promise. To those of us choked by sin, pricked with the thorns of evil, and infected with the poison of Adam, we have words of hope. That these enemies are overcome and defeated, and everlasting death is not our destiny. No, **Today, you will be with Me in Paradise.**

Third, He speaks a word of commitment. For “a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Matthew 19:5). The Son of God left His Father, came down and was born of woman, and now leaves also His mother, saying: **Woman, behold your son.** Why does He do this? To hold fast to His Bride, the Church. To hold fast, in love, to you. Yes, Jesus wants you as His Bride, and wants to die that you may be.

Fourth, He speaks a word of mercy. He is forsaken in our place. The abandonment that should be ours ever since Eden is given to Jesus instead. Though He knows, still, the enormity and darkness is excruciating. **My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?** He has mercifully taken your place.

Fifth, He speaks a word of love. I thirst. He thirsts for you, for your salvation, for your forgiveness, for your life, for your love.

Sixth, He speaks a word of victory. It is finished. The strife is over, the battle won. Though He bows His head in death, yet death is already defeated. For where sin is atoned for, death has been stripped of its power. **It is finished** - the old, evil foe is finished, death is finished, the guilt of sin is finished, our separation from God is finished, hell is finished. Victory.

And then seventh, He speaks a word of faith. Faith in His Father’s love and care. Faith that there is no better place to be than in His Father’s hands. Faith that even in the darkest depth, our Father is faithful and will not let us down. **Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.**

As you hear those seven words again tonight, in just a moment, hear them again - these seven words of grace - anew. Hear the love of God for you. Hear your salvation. Hear how precious you are to God.

And rejoice. Yes, rejoice! For tonight is not a night of remorse and sadness, but a night of joy and gladness! Jesus does not want your sympathy, your pity. He wants you, your repentance, and your faith. He wants you to see His cross as His throne; His suffering as His glory; and His death as your salvation. For this night is a night of solemn joy. *Tonight we celebrate Satan’s defeat.* That as Satan once deceived Adam and Eve by a tree in the Garden, so now Satan has been overcome by the tree of the cross. Overcome in the world. Overcome in you. And you are free.

So as the candles are extinguished now, think on these things. And see not only the extinguishing life of the Son of God on the cross, but the extinguishing of the dominion of Satan, the dominion of sin, and the dominion of death. Until there is only One that remains. The Light of the world. The Light which cannot be extinguished. The Light which leaves in death, but returns in resurrection victory. And by grace, through faith in Him, it is your victory.

So tonight, we thank God it's Friday. Good Friday. A very good Friday indeed!

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