

22 April 2011
Great and Holy Friday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Behold, the Lamb of God!”

Text: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; 2 Cor 5:14-21; John 19:17-30

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

***Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.***

What griefs burden you this day? What sorrows?
What transgressions weigh heavily on your heart and mind?
What iniquities cause you shame?
What is robbing you of peace?
How have you gone astray from your Lord and His ways, His pasture, His life?

Whatever it is, dear child of God, you are free!
For this night, we see all of these things on Jesus.
Not because *you* have put them there - who would dare do such a thing!
But because the Father has laid them on Jesus, and He bears them willingly.
So great is His love for you that He would rather bear them than you.
All those things that drag you down and make your life less than it should be.
All are on Jesus tonight.

And that makes this a good Friday. A very good Friday, indeed.
Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).
Who takes away *your* sin.

How can you be sure?
St. Paul told us tonight. His words were simple, but don't overlook them.
St. Paul said: ***He died for all.***
He said it twice, that we would know.
There is no person for whom Jesus did not die.

From Adam and Eve and the very beginning of time, to the end of time and those even not yet born. **He died for all.**

No one excluded; no one excepted; no one left out.

He died for all, which means He died for you.

No matter who you are or what you have done.

No matter how great your sin, His sacrifice is greater.

For it is no mere man who dies on the cross, but the very Son of God.

By His stripes you are healed.

Healed in the forgiveness of your sins.

The forgiveness that brings peace, and the peace that brings life.

For this He came. For this day, for this cross, for this sacrifice.

To fulfill His name, the name the prophet Isaiah said would be His: *Immanuel, God with us* (Isaiah 7:14).

God with us in the womb. God with us in birth. God with us in infancy. God with us in childhood. God with us in life. God with us in work. God with us in trials and temptations. God with us in sorrows and struggles. And God with us, yes, even in death and the grave.

Could there be a more remarkable statement than that?

Could there be a more remarkable God than that?

He is God with us in every sense of that name; in every place of our lives.

That coming to us in the depth of our sin and death, He raise us to the heights of His forgiveness and life.

That there be no place too far, no sin too deep, no person too far gone, that He cannot reach and rescue and save.

And this is the very thing He desires to do.

That all look upon Him on the cross, **esteem him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted**, and see our substitute.

The one God **made to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

And so with our sin, with our curse, He goes to Golgotha.

And from the cross, what does He speak? We will again hear.

He speaks not words of bitterness, but of forgiveness.

He speaks not words of despair, but of confidence.

Having left His Father, He now leaves His mother, and holds fast to His Bride, the Church.

He prays. The words of the psalter which sustained Him in life now sustain Him also in death.

He thirsts, for He drank the cup of suffering and death that we might drink the cup of blessing and life.

He speaks not words of defeat, but of triumph. It is finished. All that He has come

to do to make us new. It is finished.
And at the last, He commits Himself into the hands of His Father, as He had done
all along.

And with that, the great High Priest has offered Himself.
The Lamb of God for the life of the world.
And we are healed. We are forgiven. We have life again. We are a new creation.
The old swallowed up in death on the altar of the cross.
The new rising up from death and the grave.

For as He dies He hands over His Spirit.
The *Holy Spirit*, the bond of unity in the Holy Trinity, He gives to us, that we might
be drawn into that same unity and life.
And be one with Him.
His life, our life, and so our life, eternal life.

We began the service tonight with the haunting words of the Reproaches. Each of
them started the same way: *Thus says the Lord: What have I done to you, O My
people, and wherein have I offended you? Answer Me.*

What are we to answer? How can we answer for our sins to the Almighty God?
Do you remember what our answer was?
Lamb of God, pure and holy!
The answer to our sin is Jesus. Christ crucified.
Apart from Him we are guilty as charged. In Him, we are forgiven.
Apart from Him is only death. In Him, we have life.
Apart from Him we have no hope. In Him, we abound in hope.
Apart from Him we must bear our own sin. In Him, we are set free.
And remember what Jesus told us earlier: *If the Son sets you free, you are free
indeed* (John 8:36).

So you are free.
For tonight, Jesus is bound for you, is crucified for you, an offering for you.
That all your griefs, all your sorrows, all your transgressions, all your iniquity, all
your shame, all your sin be washed away in the peace of His forgiveness and love.
And they are. ***It is finished.***
You may still see them and feel them, but your Lord does not.
In His sight, *you* are pure and holy.
For you are in Christ. You are His child.

So tonight we relive the darkness, for a moment.
Not to feel sorry for Jesus, but to rejoice.
For he who by a tree overcame, is now by a tree overcome!

One time for all time.
One man for all men.
Behold, the Lamb of God!

In Jesus name. Amen.