

6 April 2012  
Great and Holy Friday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Words of Life and Victory”

Whenever a friend or a loved one is dying, there is always hope. Hope that things will perhaps turn around. No matter how grim the situation, no matter what the doctors tell us, maybe, just maybe things will turn around. Maybe something will happen - an unexpected turn for the better. Maybe a miracle. Maybe this will all end differently than we expect. We hope against hope.

Perhaps that was the thinking for the disciples and the women as well, as they saw Jesus dying on the cross. Maybe something will happen. Maybe Pilate will come around and change his mind. Maybe a miracle. To stop this, this horrible end. Hope against hope.

But with each word Jesus speaks from the cross, He is leaving. It is not going to end differently. He is going to die. He forgives. He answers the repentant prayer of the thief next to Him, and talks of being in Paradise *today*. He sees to the care of His mother. He is *forsaken* by God - no miraculous intervention, it seems. He thirsts - almost all the life is drained out of Him. It is finished. He goes to His Father in heaven. And then He is gone. It really happened. No more hope. Only grief.

*Or so it seemed.*

But the reality was quite different. Whereas our hope dies when our loved one dies, it is only beginning with Jesus' death. In fact, His death is the reason for our hope. The disciples and the women didn't know that at the time, but we, on this side of the resurrection know! And so tonight, hear the words Jesus spoken from the cross *differently* - not as His dying, *leaving* words, but as His words of fulfillment; His words of what He is accomplishing for us on the cross. These are words of life, not death. Words of grace, not grief. Words of love, not sorrow.

**+ Father, forgive them.** Forgive who? Those who crucified Him? Yes. But more. Forgive *you*. This is not the ending of a life gone horribly wrong, but the working out of the plan of our wonderful God. Just as Joseph, who was sold as a slave, thrown into prison, and languish for many years in Egypt, said: *You meant evil . . . but God meant it for good* (Gen 50:20). That is the story of the cross: God using the machinations of evil men for the greatest good. For the forgiveness of all your sins.

**+ You will be with Me in Paradise.** In the beginning, the Lord created Paradise. Not

long thereafter, the sin of Adam wreaked havoc and Paradise was lost. Now, Paradise is restored again. Now, with the forgiveness of sins, the way to Paradise is no longer blocked, but open again! And Jesus gives a promise - *today*, you will be with me there. No more tears, no more sin, no more death - only life. Everlasting life. For in the cross of Christ there is a new Tree of Life.

**+ Woman, behold your son.** Divine compassion and care? Yes. But for who? For Mary? **For you.** *For a man will leave his Father and his mother and fold to his wife, and the two will become one flesh* (Matt 19:5). Having left His Father in heaven and come down in His incarnation, Jesus now leaves His mother and holds fast to you in His death. That one flesh with Him, He take you through death to everlasting life, to the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom.

**+ My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?** Adam was driven from the Garden, Joseph was sold into slavery, the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt and they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, God's people were prisoners of war - but in all this they were not forsaken. Only Jesus. Only the one who bears the sin of the world, to pay the awful price for them. And so in life and in death, you will never be alone. He was forsaken so you will never be.

**+ I thirst.** Jesus said . . . *"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life"* (John 4:13-14). *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit . . ."* (John 7:37b-39a). Jesus thirsts on the cross and then hands over the Spirit, to you, so that you will never thirst again.

**+ It is finished.** *And God saw all that He had made and behold, it was very good* (Gen 1:31). Now, it is good again. Creation was finished on a Friday, and the new creation was finished on a Friday. Both good Fridays. Very good, indeed.

And finally,

**+ Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.** Psalm 31 verse 5. Jesus falls asleep praying, just as you often do. And that's what death is for Jesus - sleep. Just as He said about the little girl and Lazarus when He raised them. Just as He awakened them, so His Father will awake Him. He falls asleep in faith-filled expectation of the morning of resurrection. And thus death will be for us as well - like going to sleep at night and rising in the morning . . . to the day that will never end; the day in which there will be no night.

And so tonight is not a night filled with sorrow, but a night of solemn joy. For how

can these words - these seven words of grace, of life, of love - not bring us joy?

So tonight, do not sorrow. 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 day is a day of solemn joy. *Tonight we celebrate Satan's defeat.* That as we heard last night: 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.

So as the candles are extinguished now, think on these things. And see not only the *ebbing* life of the Son of God on the cross, but the *coming* of His kingdom. For tonight is the ebbing of the dominion of Satan, the dominion of sin, and the dominion of death and the coming of freedom, forgiveness, and life.

So as the candles are extinguished now, think on these things . . . 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.

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

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