

13 March 2013
Lent 4 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Lamb of God Who Suffered Scorn”

Text: Psalm 22:6-8

(Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:14-18; Matthew 27:27-44)

But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads.

Lamb of God, pure and holy . . . *Thyself to scorn didst offer.*

That’s what happened on Calvary, and it’s what happens today. Jesus is mocked and scorned, and in many different ways.

On the cross they jeered that He saved others but cannot saved Himself. They mocked that this “King of Israel” had now been enthroned *on a wooden cross*. They ridiculed His trust in God and His claim to be the Son of God. They thought Him crazy at best and dangerous at worst.

And today it is much the same. Call Jesus a prophet, or a teacher, or a good man and you’ll get no flack. But call Him God and Saviour, call His Word the objective and universal truth, call Him the one and only way to eternal life, and watch the floodgates of scorn open up again. To believe such things means you are intolerant, bigoted, narrow-minded, hateful, crazy at best and dangerous at worst.

But when they not only mock but scorn us as Christians in those ways, they are really mocking and scorning me, Jesus says. It has always been and it will always be. Satan will try to discredit Jesus any and every way he can, and making him the object of ridicule and scorn is a favorite tool of his.

A favorite tool because we don’t take scorn very well. It hurts. It’s embarrassing. The old saying - *Sticks and stone may break my bones but names will never hurt me!* - isn’t true at all, is it? How often we’d rather wish for a few sticks and stones over the mocking and scorning that doesn’t bounce off but penetrates down to our hearts. And it doesn’t take much to get us to shut up, lay low, and want blend in, does it? We knuckle under rather than take a stand on the moral issues of our day and face the risk of mockery. We’re reluctant to speak out for the truth and risk scorn. With weak knees we let the sin in the world go unchallenged and look the other way. We just don’t want to pay the price. *Lord, have mercy on us.*

And He does! That's the good news of this Lenten season - the mercy of God for us in Jesus Christ. That Jesus did not wilt or shrink from the mockery and scorn hurled against Him, but took it. Just as bravely as He took the physical abuse so did He take this emotional and spiritual abuse. And don't underestimate how hard that must have been. For if we don't want to pay the price, if it is so easy to make us cave, it was just as difficult for Jesus, who was like us in every way except without sin. We don't perhaps always think of it that way, but we should. Knowing how hard it is for us should increase our appreciation of what Jesus went through for us in *this* way as well. Jesus said His Word is like a sharp, two-edged sword - well, the mocks and jeers and scorn hurled at Him must have been like a sword too, piercing His heart that so loved the world that He was hanging there for the life of the world. An ungrateful world. A hateful world.

But hang there and take it He did. That shows us the measure of God's love for you and me, for one and all. No matter who we are or what we've done, no matter how we've caved and given in or even *joined* the crowd of mockers at times, Jesus stayed there, hung there, and took it, that those very sins be paid for and forgiven. We don't want to pay the price, but Jesus did. **For you.**

Which doesn't mean that your sin doesn't matter - it most certainly does. And we should hate it, and we should hate ourselves when we cave and give in, and we should repent of it and pray for the strength and faith not to do it again.

And our Lord hears those prayers. In fact, those prayers are music to His ears! And so He embraces us with His forgiveness to comfort us, and He pours out His Spirit to strengthen us, and He fills us with His love to guide us and help us. To help us speak and act in love and in truth. Just as Jesus. To be as Paul, and to be, as he says, *shining lights in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation*. And if we are mocked and scorned in return, to rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.

That's not easy, but it is compassionate. It is the compassion which kept Jesus on the cross for a world blinded by sin and so couldn't see who this really was hanging on the cross for them - the very Son of God wrapped in human flesh; and who couldn't see what this death was accomplishing - the very life of the world, the forgiveness of our sins.

Maybe we sometimes take that for granted, we who have been given the eyes of faith to see that. But tonight, think again on the high price tag that delivered that gift - not just the physical suffering but the scorn that Jesus took for us as He was treated ***like a worm and not a man***; like a fool and not a king; like a devil not the God of all. Yet in love He lowers Himself to this for you and takes it all.

But it will not always be that way. Though the true identity of Jesus was hidden on the cross, and is hidden to many today, the day of resurrection is coming - the day when (as we heard last week) every knee shall bow before Jesus as the Lord of all. We bow our knees now, ashamed of our sins and failings, because we know this day is coming; because we know that our resurrected Lord comes to us even now with His forgiveness and raises us back to our feet in His love. For though we are ashamed of our sins, as we should be, He is not ashamed of us. No, He wants you as His son, His daughter, and so keeps coming for you with His life and salvation through His Word and Sacraments. To give you what you need. To give you Himself.

As you continue to receive that, and believe that, and live that, the mocking and scorn will continue. Count on it. But you are not alone. Your Saviour who came for you will also keep you until the day of His appearing, when all will be revealed; when *the Lamb of God who suffered scorn* is scorned no more, and the eternal day of praise begins. That day is coming, so do not fear. Boldly follow where He leads. Your God will not forsake you.

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