

24 March 2013
Palmarum / Passion Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Where are Their Gods? Hear! *Here!*”

Text: Deuteronomy 32:36-39; Philippians 2:5-11
John 12:12-19; Luke 22:1 - 23:56

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

Where are their gods? . . . Let them rise up and help you; let them be your protection!

Those are the words of God through Moses to the people of Israel on the border of the Promised Land about the gods of the Canaanites. They reminded me of a story I once heard from a missionary who visited my church in New York. He was working somewhere in the far east, I don't remember exactly where, when an earthquake struck. The people, of course, were very frightened and running out of their houses. But then, he said, something very strange happened. They started rushing back into their crumbling, tottering houses. He couldn't figure out why, so he stopped one of the people and asked what was going on. And this was the answer he got: *We have to save our gods.* They were risking their lives to save their gods which were sitting on the shelves and altars of their collapsing homes.

What a starkly different picture we hear today and this Holy Week. The one, true God doesn't need saving - we are the ones who need saving! And it is the one, true God who rushes into our crumbling, tottering world to save us. Not just *risking* His life, but *giving* it. Offering His life on the altar of the cross to atone for our sin, break the grip of death and the grave, and silence the accusations of the devil against us. That all who believe in Him be forgiven their sin, have the promise of a resurrection to eternal life, and need not fear the evil one. Though he is still lurking, though death still comes upon us, and though sin erupts from us and descends upon us from others, these things, these enemies cannot harm those who are in Christ Jesus. He is your protection. He is the one who rose up from heaven to come and help you, and He is the one who rose up from death to save you.

That is why we begin the church year with shouts of ***Hosanna!*** and why we begin Holy Week with the same shout: ***Hosanna! Lord, save!*** For this He was born, rushing into our collapsing world as the babe of Bethlehem, and for this He rides into Jerusalem on the donkey - to save. From His birth, through His life, to His death and resurrection, everything for one purpose only - to rescue us. And so as

we will hear He does not defend Himself, He does not speak for Himself, He does not fight back. Though His death on the cross, laden with the sin of the world, is a most difficult thing to do - and so His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane - if this need be done for us, He will do it, and nothing will stop Him.

For though he was in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name . .

And still today. Still today our Lord is rushing into our world to save. So if you are asked ***Where is your God?*** Then answer: *He is here.* He has not gone away. Everytime the Word is read He is speaking, everytime a person is baptized He is washing, everytime you are forgiven He is cleansing, everytime you receive His Body and Blood He is feeding. In all these ways your Lord is not far away, but here *for you, here with you, to save and protect you.* And all persons. For He bore the sins of all that all might be saved.

Yes, these are humble means, but He came humbly, born in a manger. Yes, these are humble means, but He entered Jerusalem humbly, on a donkey. Yes, these are humble means, but ***he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*** That's the point, you see. He came to serve not be served. He came to save not be saved. He came to glorify you not be glorified by you.

*That last one sounded funny, didn't it? For aren't we to glorify God? Well, we do, but that's not why He came. The glory He receives in heaven far outstrips whatever glory we could give Him. And how we do so, how we glorify Him, is not by being and acting all great and glorious and showing how great and glorious God makes us - we'll hear, in fact, the disciples arguing about that in just a moment. No, Jesus calls us to this glory - *the glory and the greatness of humility, lowliness, and service.* Or as St. Paul said: ***Have this mind among yourselves.*** The selfless, sacrificing mind - and love - of Christ. The mind and love of Christ that rushed into our crumbling, tottering world to save us.*

And you have that mind. For, Paul goes on to say, ***which is yours in Christ Jesus.*** But it is not something that you do or conjure up in yourself, but is given to you. For the Spirit of our Lord is given to you. And with His Spirit in you, renewed in mind and heart, you do as He does. Rushing into the crumbling, tottering places of this world not to save your God, but to be like Him and help those still in danger, those caught up in sin, those in need, those whose world is collapsing around them. And

that is what we see after Pentecost, after the Spirit is given to the Church. The apostles no longer think of greatness and glory as they once did, but do those very things, even giving their lives.

Where is your God?

Today, this week, we hear where our God is: on the cross! We hear that He did rise up and help us. Hear it today: He is praying for you. He is arrested for you. He is on trial for you. He offers Himself for you. He is condemned and crucified for you. And then next Sunday, we will celebrate also that He was raised for you, and now lives and reigns for you. And when He comes again in glory, to take you to a home that will not crumble, totter, or collapse, but which will last forever.

And so today, this week, hear and receive your Saviour - His Body and Blood given *for you* on the cross, and now given *to you* in His Supper. As He comes for you and gives you Himself.

Where is your God? He is here. Let us hear now and ponder His passion - His holy passion, for you.

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