

29 March 2013
Great and Holy Friday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“A Wormy Saviour”

Text: Psalm 22:6

(Isaiah 52:13-53:12; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; John 19:17-30)

But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people

(Psalm 22:6). We'll hear those words about Jesus from Psalm 22 in just a bit, during the tenebrae section of our service tonight.

I thought about that verse a bit this week. I thought about worms. Jesus was treated like a worm and not a man. So, how do we treat worms? Not very well, usually. While digging the garden we put shovels through them and cut them in half. If we see them on the sidewalk we often step on them. We put them on fish hooks as bait. We love watching as the robins in our yards listen for them and then pull up a juicy one as food. And that's when we're even thinking about them, which really isn't much of the time. They're good and useful and part of our Lord's creation - but frankly, not very important to most of us most of the time.

And then I got to thinking about the worm's distant cousin, the slug. I often see them on the sidewalk, like I see worms. And I treat them even worse than worms. I pull out the salt and pour a generous amount over them and delight in watching them melt into nothingness.

That's how Jesus was treated. Like a worm, He was stepped on in pride and self-centeredness. He was chewed up and spit out by the Jewish establishment - those who thought they were something. Those who mocked and scorned Him while He was hanging on the cross were pouring salt into His wounds. He was considered worth nothing. Like a worm, like a slug, just get rid of Him; throw Him away.

Let's be clear and remember: It was not just a man they were doing this to. This is the God of creation, who created everything by simply the power of His Word. This is the God of the universe, who is holding all things together and keeping them in order. This is the God of all who could crush us like a worm, but instead allows Himself to be *treated like a worm*. Treated like a worm by those less than worms.

And it wasn't just those people way back then. The Reproaches sung at the beginning of the service were directed at us, too. We are the ones who put Him on the cross with our sins. We are the one rubbing salt in His wounds with our unholy, unchristian thoughts, words, deeds, and desires. We are the ones who instead of

giving Him the sweet wine of good works give Him the vinegar and gall of our disobedience and rebellion. We are the ones who do not produce the fruits of faith that we should. We are the ones. We are the ones He became a worm for.

You could understand it, I suppose, if He did it for good and righteous people. At least that would make some sense. But St. Paul wrote that while maybe, just maybe someone would die for a righteous person or a good person - ***God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*** (Romans 5:7-8). So here's what that means: if Jesus had come to be treated that way and die for good and righteous people, that would only make Him a martyr or maybe a saint. But being treated that way and dying for sinners **makes Him a Saviour**.

The Reproaches showed us that too. For after each reproach, after each word of what you and I have given our Saviour in exchange for His love, we might rightly expect a word of rejection: *You are no longer my people! I'm done. I've done enough.* But that is not what we heard. Instead, He says: *O my people! My people,* He says. Assuring us we are still His own.

But even more than that, He is on the cross **to make us His own**. That's what Isaiah said: ***He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds 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. . . . [I]t was the will of the Lord to crush him . . . [T]he righteous one, my servant, [shall] make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.***

That's what Good Friday is all about - the righteous one for the unrighteous; the perfect one for the guilty; the faithful one for the faithless; the living one for the dead; the blessed one for the cursed. The great exchange. He became what we are, that we become what He is - sons of God. ***For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.***

And best of all: ***It is finished.*** He did it. All that needed to be done for us is done. There is nothing more to add; nothing more that *could* be added. All the Scriptures have been fulfilled, all sin atoned for, and we have been reconciled to God in Christ Jesus. ***It is finished.*** Three words in English, one word in Greek, but no word so great as that. Hanging between heaven and earth, Jesus brings heaven and earth together again. Pleading to God for men and pleading to men for God.

So tonight, we have a wormy Saviour, and He wouldn't have it any other way. Hear His love for you tonight. Hear of your forgiveness tonight. Hear His promises tonight. Hear His fulfillment tonight. Hear and believe: He did this all **for you**. Not just for the world, but for you. Wormy you. Sinful you. That you be wormy and

sinful no more.

And if there are others around you being wormy . . . pray for them, forgive them, love them, help them. Like Jesus. Being sons of your Father in heaven.

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