

15 April 2017
Easter Vigil

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Rest in the Word”

The United States dropped the “mother of all bombs” in Afghanistan a couple of days ago. The noise from that blast deafening. The destruction overwhelming. But after the echoes cease and the crumbling settles, there is quiet. A complete, almost heavy, silence.

In a little less dramatic way, the same is true after a storm. After a significant snow storm, when the earth is blanketed in white, if you go outside, there is quiet. A complete, almost heavy, silence.

It is the same silence we felt here the past two nights. On Thursday, the service was over, the altar was stripped. We stood in silence. A complete, almost heavy, silence. *What just happened? What do we do next?*

Last night as well. We heard of Jesus’ passion, the lights were out - except for one. Silence. *What just happened? What do we do next?*

It is the silence of rest. What is usual and ordinary stops. And there is quiet. A complete, almost heavy, silence. A *sabbath* rest.

That is what we do tonight. Rest. But not just rest by doing nothing. Rest as God intended it. Rest in His Word. Tonight answers the questions: *What just happened? What do we do next?* We hear from the Old Testament what just happened, because it was foretold what would happen. The great stories of the Old Testament in reality just glimpses of the even *greater* story of what Jesus would do. We think about this, and then know what to do next. That will come tomorrow, as we break out in full-throated joy on Easter. But not yet. Tonight we rest.

The Church used to do that as well with those who were baptized at Easter. After such a big event in their lives, they needed time to rest and think: *What just happened? What do we do next?* And so the whole week after Easter, they rested in the Word of God. Everyday, hearing the stories and hearing of what had just happened to them. Their new life. Their new reality.

So we do that too. We remember our baptism and the new life given to us; the new reality in which we now live. The life of Christ crucified, the life of Christ risen, now our life. That’s a big deal, though we may not always think about it or realize it.

Because really, with the death and resurrection of Jesus, the mother of all bombs has been exploded. Satan thought he was dropping it on us. The reality is that Christ was dropping it on Him. And now his kingdom is in ruins. His answer to the questions: *What just happened?* And: *What do we do next?* quite different than ours!

And that's why we can rest. Satan's kingdom is in ruins. Christ has won. And so our quiet is not like the devastating aftermath of a bomb blast, but more of the after-the-snowfall quiet. Or as Isaiah put it: *though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow* (Isaiah 1:18). Tonight, Christ has covered the ugliness and filth of our sin with His perfect, white, pure forgiveness. So that we can rest, now and forever, in His love.

And so tonight we enjoy a sabbath rest as God always intended our sabbath rest to be - not just a ceasing from work, but a resting in His Word. A resting that gives us far more.

So listen as Jesus explains to us from the Old Testament *what just happened?* and *what do we do next?* Marvel at how He has stitched all things together in Himself, as we wait - as I tell you every year - not as mourners remembering the dead, but as wise virgins awaiting the coming of the Bridegroom.

Oh, and in case you were wondering . . . about the rebuilding that takes after a bomb blast, and the shoveling that takes place after the snowfall . . . well, Jesus has taken care of that, too. His body is risen and restored to life; what was destroyed has been rebuilt. And so, too, will our bodies be, when on the Last Day He shovels all the dirt off our graves and we rise to life with Him. And that day will be a day of rest as well. Not a day of doing nothing, but true rest. An eternal sabbath rest. Resting in the Word and in His praise. Forever.

This is the night. Come and rest.