

12 April 2017  
Holy Wednesday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Greenspring Village, Springfield, VA

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Text: Psalm 70 (John 13:16-38)

***O Lord, do not delay!***

Two words that are almost always bad news are: *Too late!* Sometimes the bad news is small, such as when we are *too late* for a sale at a store, *too late* using a coupon that has expired or sending in for a rebate, or *too late* getting to the food in the refrigerator that has already gone bad. But sometimes it is much worse than that. Such as when the paramedics don't get to someone in time and it is *too late* to save them. *Too late* is almost never good news.

Today in the psalm, David is praying for God to come and help him. ***Make haste, O God, to deliver me!*** he says. ***O Lord, make haste to help me! I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! O Lord, do not delay!***

You know how David feels. Because sometimes it seems as if God is taking His sweet time, doesn't it? That He's not acting as quickly as we need Him to. A couple of weeks ago, we heard of the time when Jesus' friend Lazarus was seriously ill and Jesus waited two days before going to see Him, and by the time He got there, Lazarus had died. Jesus was *too late*. And both of Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, both say to Jesus: Lord, you're too late! *If you had been here*, if you had just gotten here sooner, *my brother would not have died* (John 11:21, 32).

Old Testament Israel often thought the same thing - that God was waiting too long; that God was not acting quickly enough. The enemy is on the doorstep, God! Why aren't you doing something about it? ***O Lord, do not delay!***

The reality is that sometimes God does delay, He does wait, in order to test us. And I mean that in two ways. First, to test us as in an examination. Not that God needs to see where our faith is and how strong it is - we need to see that. And usually, it is a test we fail. Like the disciples, we are often little faiths and we see how quickly and easily our faith can be shaken. But second, God also tests us to strengthen us. He delays, He waits, in order to purify us. To get us to put our faith in Him. To get to us pray words like these of David that we heard today. To get us to stop relying on ourselves and turn to Him for what we need. Such times aren't easy, but they are good. God working good for us and in us.

Yet this is true too: God is never too late. He acts, always, at just the right time (Galatians 4:4) and in just the right way. Though it may not be our time and our way. But if it's not,

it's not because God is wrong - its because we are. We want something too soon, or something that's not good for us. We want things now; we don't like to wait. But sometimes we must wait. We must wait for the Lord.

Tonight in the reading from John that we heard, it doesn't speak there of waiting, but we hear how Jesus not only knows what is going to happen, but that He is in control of the situation. Sometimes when we think of all that happened to Jesus this Holy Week, it seems like everything is going wrong, everything is falling apart, everything is not as it should be.

But exactly the opposite is true. And that's we heard tonight. Jesus tells His disciples what is going to happen *before it takes place, that when it does take place*, He says, *you may believe that I am he*. He knows He will be betrayed. He knows who will do it. He knows how it will be done. He knows Peter is going to deny Him three times. He knows He is about to be glorified - which is Jesus' way of saying *crucified*. For there, on the cross, He will show us the glory of God. For the glory of God is to love us and lay down His life for us. There on the cross, Jesus is fulfilling the words of David's psalm: He is delivering us, helping us, and saving us, the poor and needy ones.

And that is what we will remember and celebrate the next three days: Jesus saving us through His death and resurrection. Tomorrow night He will give bread to us who have betrayed Him with our sin, but this bread will be His Body for the forgiveness of our sins; and with it not satan, but His Spirit will enter into us. Then He will go to the cross, not denying us, but embracing us. And then He will be placed in a tomb. And the women and the disciples and all His followers will say: *It is too late. He is gone*.

But you know that wasn't true. It sure seemed like it at the time, just as it often seems like it to us. But everything happened just right; exactly according to plan. David's psalm was fulfilled some more. Those who sought Jesus' life were put to *shame and confusion*. Those who *delighted in His hurt* were *turned back and brought to dishonor*. And the women who went seeking for Him on that Sunday morning did, in fact, *rejoice and were glad*. And they confessed: *God is great!* Greater than sin, greater than death, greater than the grave, greater than the devil, greater than any enemy that hounds and harasses us.

God saw us in our need. He came to us, and He delivered us.

But still we will pray this psalm of David, because the enemy will still come after us. We will be betrayed by those we thought our friends; others may deny us in our time of need. And at such times, we call on God, knowing that He will hear and answer our prayer. He might delay, but He won't be too late.

But then this too: we will pray this psalm in love for others, in their time of need. For that is what Jesus bids us do: *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another:*

*just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* And with such love, with such prayers, with us laying down our lives for others, God is glorified. For we show Him to be the lover of man, the helper of the poor and needy, the fulfiller of His Word, and the keeper of His promises. The one we can rely on.

So come now, let us go to the cross, and see the love and the glory of the Lord.

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