

14 April 2017  
Good and Holy Friday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“And the Light Increases . . .”

Text: John 18-19; Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

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

An early Medieval theologian and monk named Hesychius of Alexandria wrote that when Jesus preached of not hiding a lamp under a basket but putting it on a stand for all to see (Matthew 5:15), *Jesus was talking about Himself*. For He is the Light of the world (John 8:12), now put up on the stand of the cross to give light to all the world. To enlighten us to the greatness of God’s love, and the greatness of His forgiveness. That He would do this, what we remember especially this night, for us. For sinners like us.

And so a strange thing will be happening tonight. As the lights dim and the candles go out, at the same time as it will be getting darker, *it will also be getting lighter*. For the light of Jesus and His love will be getting brighter and brighter. As His life decreases our life increases. The son dies as a criminal, that we sinners live as sons of God. That’s what this night, and indeed Jesus’ whole life, is all about. You and your life.

So tonight we remember that our **great high priest** passes from life to death and the grave, not in defeat, but to conquer it. That then passing from death to life, rising from the grave and **passing through the heavens**, we will do so also with Him. That is our confession, our testimony, as we gather here tonight. That there is light in the midst of darkness, and life in the midst of death. Because sometimes in our world - and even in us - the darkness and death seem to deep, too much; the evil too great. The way people treat each other. The wars and inhumanity. The evil that is approved of as good, and the good that is rejected as evil. And we wonder about the future. We doubt whether the good will really win or be stamped out. And we fear, for ourselves and for our children.

But tonight we see that we are not the first to live through such times. As Jesus hung on the cross, shedding his blood and breathing His last breaths, His followers wondered all those things, too. And probably more. Everything was coming apart and unraveling. All their hopes, dashed. Their faith greatly shaken. A world of all evil and no good is a frightening place indeed.

But the one who gave them their faith would not let it be extinguished. He would sustain them through this time of great darkness, even as He will sustain us. And not just for a few days, until the joy and light of Jesus’ resurrection, but until the Last Day, when Jesus

returns and we pass through the heavens with Him, to light without darkness and life that has no end. We know that day is coming. We know that the darkness and evil we now see will not win. We belong to the one who is greater than it all.

So that's why - as we hear the story again and the lights are dimmed and the candles are extinguished - at the same time as it will be getting darker, *the light increases . . .* The world sees a dying man. We see a victorious Saviour.

So we'll hear in a moment that when Jesus is arrested, Peter draws the sword. No Peter - this is not that kind of fight. You can't win it that way. The victory will be in Jesus' death. *And a candle goes out, and the light increases . . .*

Then we'll hear of Peter's denials. Without his sword, robbed of his earthly weapon, he cowers in fear. This fight will be fought by only one. Alone. *And a candle goes out, and the light increases . . .*

Then Jesus is on trial before the earthly authority. And here, the Good One is called evil, and the evil they are doing they think good. Pilate asks, ***What is truth?*** He doesn't really want to know. He is mocking. Can truth be known? Does truth even really matter? Or does what we think is best matter more than the truth? Many today ask those same questions and think those same thoughts. But in response, Jesus doesn't fight back, He simply confesses the truth. For the truth will win. *And a candle goes out, and the light increases . . .*

After that the words of the prophet Isaiah are fulfilled. Jesus is ***stricken, smitten, and afflicted***. He ***bears our griefs and carries our sorrows***. He is mocked, He is struck, He is belittled. And then the chief priests utterly and fully rejected their God: ***We have no king but Caesar***. It is as John wrote at the very beginning of His Gospel: *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him*. Jesus is handed over to be crucified, where He will be death's death. *And a candle goes out, and the light increases . . .*

Next, He is stripped of all His garments and hung up on the cross. The Romans did it to shame Him, but He is not ashamed. For Adam, without sin, was naked but not ashamed. And so Jesus, the sinless one, is not ashamed. He is restoring what Adam lost. He is making all things good again. *And a candle goes out, and the light increases . . .*

Then we see and hear the love of our heavenly Bridegroom. The One who left His Father to come down to earth, now also leaves His mother to cling to His Bride, the Church. To us. To you. He will not save Himself. He will save you. He will cling to you, your sin, your death, your grave, that you have Him, His forgiveness, His life, and His kingdom. He says ***it is finished***, and "it" is. Not His life - your salvation. *And a candle goes out, and the light increases . . .*

And then finally, He is laid in the grave. How many have been laid beside Him in such graves since that day? Friends and loved ones, young and old, well-known and unknown. He joins them, so that they may join Him. All washed with *the blood and water that flowed from His side*, washed clean of their sins. He joins them, so that they may join Him. And when you, one day, join Him there, in the grave, it is with that confidence: that you will join Him not only there, but where He now is, in Paradise. *And a candle goes out, and the light increases . . .*

And how bright that final light shines in the darkness. John's words again. What He wrote at the beginning of His Gospel, now true: *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it* (John 1:5). And so we'll sing:

*And then from death awaken me,  
That these mine eyes with joy may see,  
O Son of God, Thy glorious face,  
My Savior and my fount of grace.*

And He will.

*Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend,  
And I will praise Thee without end* (LSB #708 v.3).

And we will.

Because tonight, the light is on the stand for all the world to see.

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