

18 April 2003
Good Friday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Sin and Love on Display”

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

As I sat down to write this sermon, I heard that somewhere around 170 American and British soldiers have died in the war in Iraq. They died for me, that I might be able to live in freedom. But not only them, but also consider how many others have died for you and me – in the first Gulf War, in Viet Nam, in Korea, in the World Wars, and in many other wars and conflicts and struggles – they died for us, that we might live in freedom. . . . But tonight, we remember the One who died for you and me on the cross. That death too was so that we might live in freedom – being freed from our sin, being freed from the fear of death, and being freed from the grip of the grave. Just One died for us that day, Jesus Christ. But His death means more for us than the deaths of all the others who may have died for us combined. Because on the cross, it was not one man dying for another man. **No. On the cross, God died for me.** The High died for the low. The Shepherd died for the sheep. The Creator died for His creation. The Perfect died for the sinful.

As we heard from the prophet Isaiah: ***“He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes 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.”***

Luther said that with this picture of the cross, we come to know both God and ourselves. We come to know ourselves because look, that is your sin there. Your transgressions, your iniquities, your chastisement, your stripes, your death. The evil deeds your hands have done are the nails through His hands. The evil places your feet have taken you are the nails through His feet. The evil thoughts which fill your mind are the thorns which pierce His head. The evil lust which fills your heart is the spear which is thrust up into His side. The lies and venom that spew from your mouth are the mocks and taunts which fill His ears. . . . Take a good look, fellow sinners, at your sin. See what you have wrought.

But in seeing this, do not despair. Do not let guilt and grief overtake you, because your

Lord Jesus Christ is not there unwillingly. Although He was put on the cross by force, it was not force that put Him there. It was love. His love for you. Yes, His love. For as Jesus told His disciples, ***“No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”*** (John 10:18) It was not Judas, or the Jews, or Pilate, or our sins that took Jesus’ life from Him. No, He laid it down of His own accord. He laid it down because of His great love for His Father, and for you. That you might be free. And so although on the cross He suffered and struggled under the torments of our sin and the abandonment of His Father – He dies not in struggle, but in peace and confidence, saying, ***“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”***

And so by looking at the cross we come not just to know ourselves and the seriousness of our sin, but to know God. For there we see Him as He really is. His heart on display for all to see. He *wanted* to be there. And in His death, in just one drop of His perfect blood, is the remission of all our sin. The price paid in full. The punishment meted out in full measure. . . . And it was no surprise to Jesus, our Saviour. He knew exactly what He was in for. He knew these words from the prophet Isaiah, which so describe what He would be subjected to. For He told His disciples, ***“everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.”*** (Luke 18:31) And that all *was* accomplished He states right before He dies, using the same word He had said earlier to His disciples: ***“It is accomplished. It is finished.”*** He has fulfilled all the Scriptures – nothing more need to be done. He has accomplished our salvation – nothing more need to be done. He has set us free – nothing more need be done!

Yet Isaiah provides another detail for us in his prophecy, by which we come to know God. For he says, ***“It was the will of the Lord to crush Him; He has put Him to grief; [yet] when His soul makes an offering for sin, He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days.”*** . . . God intended all along for life to trump death. For a dead man cannot see his offspring, and his days have come to an end. But not for Jesus! For although He dies, He will see His offspring, those who will be born of water and the Spirit. And although He dies his days will be prolonged. Because our death cannot end His life! He did really die, make no mistake about that! But He would rise and live again. Isaiah knew it, and so prophesied here of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead; . . . and Jesus knew it too. And so He could die in confidence and peace, knowing that His sacrifice would be acceptable to His Father, knowing that His through His death, He would defeat the power of death once and for all.

Now therefore this is also true for you. Now death cannot end your life either, and you can face death with confidence and peace. For the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the Lamb of God, died for you. Tonight we remember this. Tonight we give thanks for such an unspeakable gift. Let the horror of the crucifixion appall you, as you see what your sin

hath wrought. And then you will also know the love of God, who died for you, to set you free. ***“And if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.”*** (John 8:36)

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

(We continue with Hymn #121)