

16 February 2005  
Lent 1 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Ugly as Sin”

Text: Isaiah 52:14; 53:2-3 (Mark 7:14-23; Ephesians 5:25-27)

There are some pretty ugly things in our world. I've seen some pretty ugly houses, some pretty ugly cars, and just take a look at some of the old clothes and neckties hanging in the back of your closet! Hard to believe you wore something that ugly, isn't it? . . . And sometimes, we consider certain people as ugly too. Perhaps because they are overweight, or were burned or disfigured in an accident, or maybe its something else. We don't want to look, we turn away, we're bothered by it. And because of that, a barrier is erected between us and them. A barrier that is, quite honestly, sometimes very hard to overcome.

Why does that happen? Perhaps it is because in these people, we are reminded of the ugliness we see in ourselves. Or that what has happened to them could happen to me. And so to protect ourselves, to keep our own self-esteem, to continue along in our lives as blissfully as we can, we turn away, we distract ourselves, we try to think “happy thoughts” and keep the **ugliness of life** out of sight, and therefore out of mind. . . . And perhaps that works, for a while. But it never works for long. Because the *real* ugliness of life is not outside of us – it's inside of us. We heard that today in Jesus' words from St. Mark. It's not what happens to us on the outside, or what goes into us from the outside – it's what comes out of the heart. And remember that list? It's not good! ***“Evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.”*** And those things come out of even the prettiest and most handsome people we know! And when they come out – of them and us – it's pretty ugly, isn't it? And the physical appearance doesn't even matter anymore then, does it? It's just ugly. Repulsive. The ugliness of sin.

That is the ugliness that Isaiah speaks of tonight. Of Jesus, the suffering servant. An appearance marred and disfigured; so much so that He was scarcely recognizable as a human being. He was like a plant growing in dry land – not vigorous and strong and shiny, but weak and struggling and wilting and dry. No form or majesty to attract our eyes; no beauty that we should want to look and admire. He was despised and rejected by men – people didn't want to look at Him and turned away, just as we do to many today. Sorrows, grief, disfigurement; ugh, don't look! It's sad. It's ugly. It's our sin, put on Him. It's what's inside of us, put on display for all to see. For us to see. Crushing our happy thoughts, our self-esteem, and our delusions that I'm okay and you're okay. A

most difficult mirror to look at.

Yet just as our seemingly normal, healthy, outward appearance hides an ugliness of sin beneath, so too the ugliness of sin we see on Jesus hides a different reality beneath. The reality that these sins of ours are on the Son of God. These sins of ours are being borne by Him. These sins of ours are being credited to Him. The wrath of God against these sins of ours is being given to Him. Not on us and not to us; but on Him and to Him. And the forsakenness that should have been ours, the Father turning His eyes and looking away from us, rejecting us and despising us and leaving us alone because we are ugly and repulsive – that too happened to Him instead of to us. . . . *So that the ugly might be beautiful.* For ***“Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”***

And what a change! Did you note the *new words* that describe us in those verses? Cleansed, washed, splendor, no spot, no wrinkle, holy, without blemish. When God looks at us, that is now what He sees. The beauty of holiness through the forgiveness of our sins. We are no longer repulsive, but redeemed. No longer abhorrent, but absolved. No longer horrid, but holy. The death and resurrection of our suffering servant has done and provided that for us.

And therefore, we can now see a bit differently, and see not an ugly, disfigured, abhorrent man hanging on a cross, but a “Beautiful Savior.” Just as a fireman, horribly burned and disfigured, is most beautiful to the one he saved, so is Jesus most beautiful to the ones He has saved through His cross. And the wounds that He now bears for all eternity are not reminders of our sin, but of His love. His love so broad and high and wide and deep that He *would* not save Himself from the ugliness of the cross, so that He *could* save us from the ugliness of the cross. And this He has done. And no one is too ugly, no one too sinful, no one too far gone for the reach of His love and forgiveness. His sacrifice was for all the ugliness of all the world; all the sin; that all might be forgiven.

And so by faith we gather here this night. Not as the beautiful, but as the ugly. Another day, another week of ugliness and sin welling up within us, splattered on outside of us. We look in the mirror and repent. And the blood of Jesus washes us clean from all our sin. (1 John 1:7) The blood of Jesus applied in His washing Word of absolution: *“I forgive you all your sin.”* And you are no longer ugly, but in His sight, beautiful; a clean, holy, and spotless bride. And as any bride will tell you, it is the eyes of her groom that are the only eyes that matter. . . . And so may it be with us, not only in this Lenten season, but beyond. That we live in that love, and see with those eyes, as we look upon others. To

see as we are seen; to love as we are loved; to forgive as we are forgiven; and to extol the beauty of holiness, the beauty of the cross, the beauty of those wounds that have made all the difference in the world.

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