

11 March 2009
Lent 2 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Wound of Apathy”

Text: Matthew 26:31-46 (1 Kings 19:1-18; Revelation 3:7-22)

None of us is nearly as frightened of sin and hell as we should be. We don't have the first clue about how horrifying a place hell is - about its suffering, about its loneliness, about its finality. We think sin no big deal. God will forgive. Like getting a “C” on our report card - I know I'm not the best, but I'm not the worst either. And so we go on with our lives. Hurting and failing to help. Murdering reputations with our tongues. Dishonoring those God has given us for good. Living as if God did not matter and as if I mattered most. It's all good, we think.

Well tonight, go to Gethsemane with Jesus and see with your own eyes whether or not your sin is a “big deal.” Before the eyes of Jesus' soul that night was the cup that He would now drink. The cup of God's wrath against the sin of the world. Against the sins we think so little of; against the sins we think are fun and pleasing; against your sins and mine. Are they a big deal? You tell me. Jesus now looks over the brim of that cup into its fathomless depths, *and shakes in terror.*

Jesus had gone to Gethsemane to pray. He did not want to be alone and so took with Him His friends, His disciples. Do not forget that Jesus was fully human like us. That night He craved the companionship that comes from love ones. And especially He wants with Him His three closest friends: Peter, James, and John. He can no longer keep back the sorrow and grief that is weighing heavy on Him now. **“My soul,”** He says, **“is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with Me.”** And then He stumbles a few steps farther and lands on His face, beseeching His Father that **“if possible, let this cup pass from me.”** If there is any other way . . .

But here we see our Saviour, and the ultimate difference between Him and all of us sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. For even as He looks trembling into that cup of wrath and dread that we so foolishly choose time and time again; as He looks up to His Father and pleads for some other way . . . what He does next fills the soul with joy and wonder: He lowers His eyes again to the cup and says, **“nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”** He will drink this cup, so great His love for you and me.

Exhausted, Jesus now turns back to His friends for the comfort they can give. But instead of comfort, He is struck with another wound - *their apathy.* In the midst of His struggle with sin, death, and hell, they are sleeping. “Peter!” He cries out, probably startling them awake. **“Could you not watch with me one hour! Watch**

and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak."

Weak, yes. That is indeed what we are. Weak and apathetic in our lives. Weak and apathetic in our struggle against sin. Weak and apathetic in our regard for His Word. Weak and apathetic in our prayers. Weak and apathetic in our love for God and for others. Weak and apathetic in our faith. And in this we too wound our Saviour and add to the cup He must drink.

"Watch and pray" He asks of them; He asks of us. Surely they will do so now. Surely will we, right? But again when He returns they are asleep. Jesus is all alone with this, with our sin and death. One final time He returns for prayer and is strengthened. It is time to do the Father's will. Yes, He will do it. He will go forward and drink this cup - all the way to its dregs; not one drop left for you and me, that when God's cup is now offered to us, it be filled not with wrath and death, but with the sacramental blood of Jesus' life and forgiveness.

And so Jesus goes now filled with peace, trusting in His Father and submitting to His Father's will. **For to submit to the One who has loved you with an everlasting love is, in the end, not terror, but joy - no matter how dark the path may be.** So Jesus goes now in peace and joy. It will not be easy, but as He wins the battle in Gethsemane, so He will win the battle on the cross. So that just as He once woke His sleeping disciples, so too will He wake us from the sleep of death to the life He is about to win for us. A life with Him which will never end.

How awesome to see tonight the love and faithfulness of our Saviour! And to see that although we are weak, He is strong; and although we are often apathetic, He is never apathetic about us, but is filled with the resolve of love and compassion. That just as does not reject, but He feeds and strengthens a frightened and downcast Elijah, so He feeds and strengthens us in our struggles and pain. Just as He does not reject, but encourages and beseeches the churches in Revelation to faithfulness, so He encourages and beseeches us in our walk of life and faith. And just as He does not reject His weak and sleeping disciples, so He does not reject us, but looks on us in pity. The Good Shepherd who always loves His sheep.

And so in the wounds of Christ, we find healing for our wounds of apathy - for when we wound others with our cold and uncaring hearts, and when we are wounded the same. In the wounds of Christ, we discover a love that wakes us from our sleep and raises us to life again. In the wounds of Christ, we find the strength of compassion, and the joy of forgiveness. That no matter how dark our road or apathetic the world, we face nothing alone, but have a Saviour with us who fulfilled His Father's will. And so we too now go in peace and joy.

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