

25 March 2009
Lent 4 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Wound of Mockery”

Text: Matthew 27:24-31; 1 Peter 2:13-25; Jeremiah 20:7-18

They didn't know who they were stripping naked.
They didn't know who they were clothing with a purple robe.
They didn't know upon whose head they were putting a crown of thorns.
They didn't know into whose hands they pushed a reed for a scepter.
They didn't know who they were kneeling before in mock honor.
They didn't know who they were spitting on and hitting.
They didn't know.
Had they known, they would have shuddered in fear.
For they were doing all this to the Almighty God of the Universe, their creator.
Who with one word could have summoned twelve legions of angels to His defense.
Who with a single thought could have undone those soldiers and all who sought His death.
Who could have ended it all at any moment, and exacted a revenge that we cannot even begin to imagine.
The Scriptures tell us that ***our God is a consuming fire*** (Heb 12:29) . . . and they were playing with fire. And how does the old proverb go: *If you play with fire, you're gonna get burned.*

Except . . . they don't get burned, do they? *Nor do we.* For when we mock God. Now, certainly, we do not mock Him as the soldiers did, but do we not taunt Him with our sins, ridicule His forgiveness with our shallow confession, and sneer at His kingship by living as if we were the kings of our own lives? Why do we not shudder in fear? Are we too not playing with fire? . . . And yet who is the one burned? It is our Saviour, roasted on the cross in our place, taking all the fiery wrath against our sins, and offering Himself as a burnt offering for the sin of the world. And so He does not fight back, does not object, does not speak for Himself - but goes as it is written, entrusting Himself completely to His Father. His Father whose will it is that Jesus should so offer Himself. His Father whose will it is that through His sacrifice, all people might be saved.

But the truth is even more wonderful than that. For Jesus is not simply *resigned* to His fate - “Oh well! This is the way its gotta be.” No, He is filled with pity. For the soldiers, for you and me, for all who wound Him with the wound of mockery. From Him pours forth a fountain of love and compassion that we cannot fathom. For it is a human trait to love your friends and seek to do them good. But to love your

enemies, to have nothing but pity and compassion for those who taunt you and jeer at you and who are preparing to kill you - that is the mark of the divine love of our Saviour, who came to walk the road we deserve. Who came to take our place in sin, that we could take His place in heaven.

And how appropriate that we ponder our Saviour taking our place on this day, March 25. For this is the day - exactly nine months before Christmas - that the church remembers when the Son of God first began to take our place in the womb of the virgin Mary. From His conception by the Word and Spirit of God, to His death on the cross, there is no part of our life that Jesus did not live, and so no part that He did not redeem as our substitute. He fully shares in all our life and death and condemnation, that we might fully share in all His life after death and His victory and *coronation*.

For it is not an insignificant detail that Jesus is given a crown of thorns - He wears the crown of our sin. For remember where the thorns came from? They were the result of Adam's sin. But now Jesus takes our crown of sin, that we might again wear the crown of glory - the glory with which we were created; the glory that we toss aside in sin; the glory that Jesus has come to restore to us. The glory of holiness and righteousness. And He wants this for all people - even those who now mock and crucify Him. "Father, forgive them," He says. And He means it. Forgive them. Restore them.

But thus restored in Christ Jesus, the mocking that came His way will come our way as well. Sometimes that mocking is followed by persecution, and sometimes by death. Jeremiah received it; Christians all around the world receive it. And whether for you it is a little or a lot, it hurts. And when we are hurt, we want to lash back. But here, as Peter told us, Jesus is an example for us in how to deal with mockery, persecution, and worse. To follow in His steps. Jesus was the King who wasn't treated like a king, but refused to act like anything but the King He was. For He was a true King, here to serve and give and save, even ungrateful subjects. And so it is with us. We are children of God who may not be treated like children of God - but refuse to act like anything but the child of God you are. Walking in the majesty, the glory, the peace, and the forgiveness that are yours in Christ. Loving and forgiving and serving, even those who are ungrateful.

That's hard. But you can. You can because in the wounds of Christ we find healing for our wounds of mockery. In the wounds of Christ, we see the compassion that looks past and through the mockery, and loves. In the wounds of Christ, we see the forgiveness that conquers hates and revenge. In the wounds of Christ, we see the blood that cries out to the Father, "forgive them." And we are forgiven. All our sins washed away in that flood from His hands and feet and side. And we are healed. All our wounds healed by His touch. And we are restored. No longer cast down in

sin, but now raised up and alive in our risen Saviour. Others may not know what they're doing, but we do, for we know who we are, and whose we are. We belong to a God whose sacred Head was wounded for us. Or, as we have been singing each week:

O sacred Head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns, Thine only crown.
O sacred Head, what glory,
What bliss, till now was Thine!
Yet, though despised and gory,
I joy to call Thee mine. (LSB #450 v.1)

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