

10 April 2009
Great and Holy Friday Tenebrae

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Behold the Life-Giving Cross”

The first words of the Epistle we just heard said this: **“For the love of Christ controls us.”**

But it doesn't, does it?

Instead, our emotions control us; our anger and temper control us; our sinful lusts control us; our apathy and lethargy control us; our fears and anxieties control us; our love of self controls us. And as a result we do what we ought not do, and we do not do what we ought do. We are sinners through and through. Not just in what we do, but in who we are. And therefore we deserve to die.

That is why we are here this night. **To see our death.** *But to see it on another!* On our substitute: Jesus, the Christ; Son of Man and Son of God. Tonight we see what we deserve but are not given, that we be reconciled to God; that we be a new creation; that the love of Christ control us.

For what kind of love is this? The King dies for His subjects. The Shepherd dies for sheep who love to wander. The Creator allows His creatures to crucify Him. The Son of God is treated not even as good as a common criminal, but as the worst and vilest of criminals, receiving the punishment reserved for only the lowest of the low.

What kind of God does this? *The true God.*

The God who loves with a love not of this world, but which surpasses all understanding. The God who in love, in the beginning, created all things; and who now, in love, dies, that His creation be made new again. For not by destroying the old and starting over again does He make His creation new - His love would not let Him do that. Instead, He comes to take our sin and death and destruction into Himself, that dying our death, we then rise with Him to a new life. Not the same old life in new clothes - but a new life. So new that it is as if the old never happened! For that is what forgiveness is - a taking away of your sin so that it is as if it never happened at all.

And if your sin is gone, you are reconciled to God.

If your sin is gone, you are a new creation.

If your sin is gone, you are no longer controlled by your sin, but now **the love of Christ controls us.**

And you are that new creation!

That is why we are here this night. **To see our life.**

For while it is true that our old, sinful flesh still clings to us, and therefore we still do what we ought not do, and we still do not do what we ought do, **that is no longer who you are.**

For you are here tonight not just to think about what Jesus endured for you, and to ponder and meditate upon it - *but to receive it.*

For you are a new creation not because you willed it, or so desired it, or accomplished it - but because Jesus willed it, desired it, and accomplished it, **for you.**

He came for you - He did not wait for you to come.

He took your sins - He did not wait for you to give them.

And then He suffered for you, was forsaken for you, hung for you, and died for you.

So when, therefore, He said: ***It is finished*** - it truly was.

And since our sin and death and destruction were finished, after a Sabbath rest in the grave, He could do no other than rise on the third day. For life has the final word, not death. And life has the final word for you and me.

That life is given you in Holy Baptism, where you are planted into Jesus' death and resurrection and given a new life.

That life is given you in Holy Communion, where Jesus' crucified and resurrected body is planted into you and you are given a new life.

That life is given you in Holy Absolution, where our old sins and grudges, lusts and fears, that still cling to us are lanced in confession, and you are given a new life.

A new life of love; Christ's love.

That is why we are here this night. **To see this love.**

This love so graciously given to us, that ***the love of Christ control us.***

Control us, not as robots, but as sons and daughters of God.

To live not as debtors, but as free.

To live not in fear, but in confidence.

To live not under the Law, but in thanksgiving.

That is why you are here this night.

To behold the life-giving cross on which was hung your salvation.

See how much He loves you!

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