

Jesu Juva

“His Love for You”

Text: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; 2 Corinthians 4:14-21; John 19:17-30

If you were God, if you were almighty and could do anything, what would you do? Tonight, we see how God chose to use His power - to die for you.

Is that not a most remarkable statement? Perhaps we hear it so much we're used to it. But realize again tonight what exactly we are marking - that the God who is so powerful, so great, and so mighty, who created all there is simply by His Word, who holds all time and all life in His hands, freely chooses to become weak for you and die. And not just die, but to die *your* death. A sinner's death. A criminal's death. A most agonizing and humiliating death. Everyone's death, that everyone may live.

Could He have chose to use His power to simply wipe out what He had created? Yes. He did somewhat once with a flood. But to wipe out *all* . . . His love would not let Him do. You see, that's the thing. In this world you have those who are mighty but not loving - we call them tyrants. You have those who are loving but not mighty. But when you combine all power with perfect love, you have God. The God of life. The God of the cross.

And so we remembered at Christmas His weak and humble birth. As He grows, He accepts the weakness and limitations of man - hunger, thirst, sorrow, temptation, rejection. Then in loving and willing weakness He allows Himself to be arrested and cruelly abused, as Isaiah said tonight: ***despised and rejected by men***, and ***stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted***. He who holds all universes in His hands is ***crushed for our iniquities***, and He doesn't even speak in defense or objection. Oh how we and our world today would cry out! The unjustness and unfairness! Trying to get what we can. Not Him. He will give - give Himself for us. He will be weak with us. He will be low with us. He will die with us. And Jesus is never so strong as when He is hanging on the cross in loving weakness, for you.

And with His death ***He reconciles you to God***. You and all people, alienated from God by sin. For as St. Paul said, ***He became*** [that] ***sin for us***. Another most remarkable statement that we perhaps do not appreciate the enormity of. He *became* sin, the sin of all the world, and the sin *offering*, the perfect lamb and the scapegoat. All your sins on Him, and then He pays their wages: ***It is finished, and He bows His head and hands over the Spirit***, His Spirit. To you.

And so, Paul says, ***the love of Christ controls us***. This love. It is not fear of a powerful God that controls us, but the love of Christ, the love of God become weak for us. The love so lavishly poured out for us in all His life and in His passion and death, as the readings, hymns, and even the darkness, so abundantly portray for us tonight.

And yet how often does the love of Christ not control us. When we lose sight of this love of the cross, when we take our eyes off of it, and go our own way. Our sinful way, when we are controlled not by the love of Christ, but by laziness, rebellion, stubbornness, selfishness, despair, doubt, and our love for the things of this world.

And so we gather this night to repent of all that and to see once again the sacrifice that atoned for all those sins, every single one, none excluded, and so gives us hope and life and the love that we need. The sacrifice of the

Lamb of God, pure and holy, who on the cross didst suffer,

Ever patient and lowly, [Him]self to scorn didst offer.

All sins [He] borest for us, Else had despair reigned o'er us:

Have mercy on us, O Jesus! O Jesus! (LSB #434)

And He does, have mercy. For He hangs there on the cross not because of some miscarriage of justice and not because of the control of the Romans or the envy and hatred of the Jews, but because He is merciful; because He is giving Himself for you; because He lays down His life for you; because He loves you. Powerfully.

Powerful tonight His word of forgiveness.

Powerful tonight His word promising Paradise.

Powerful tonight His leaving His mother to the care of His disciples, that leaving Father and mother He hold fast to His Bride, you.

Powerful tonight His cry of forsakenness for you.

Powerful tonight His thirst for your salvation

Powerful tonight He finishes His course.

Powerful tonight He entrusts Himself to His Father and breathes His last.

This is not the end of His life, though. He will live again. On the contrary, this is the end of the power of our sin, the end of our condemnation, the end of our death. This is the beginning of *the new creation*, for the seed that falls into the ground and dies arises from the ground to grow - and is still growing. And we, baptized into Him, grafted as branches into Him, the true vine, are new creations in Him. His forgiveness and love controlling us, that *if we could do anything . . .* we would do as He did: *lay down our lives for others*, those God has brought into our lives, who need *our* love.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us now hear again His loving words spoken from the cross. Powerful words. Not really His *last* words, for His third day is coming and He will speak again.

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