

22 March 2017  
Lent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“*Where in the World Is God? Under Arrest*”

Text: Acts 5:17-32; John 18:1-12

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Where in the world is God?* As we’ve been considering, it’s not where one might expect. It’s not in power and causing others to fear. It’s not in glory and victory. It’s not in those places we would think to look. He’s on a donkey, He’s in a garden, praying. And tonight, He’s *under arrest*.

Even saying that sounds funny, doesn’t it? As if we puny little creatures could place the God of the universe, the God who rules the universe and provides all that we need; the God of creation, the God who created us and without whom we would not be alive; the God who will come again to judge the living and the dead, to judge us - as if we could place Him under arrest. And how foolish! To place under arrest the One who cares for and provides for us. But that is exactly what happens. Jesus is bound with ropes and hauled off for trial.

Of course, it would not have happened, *could* not have happened, had He not allowed it to be so. How easy it would have been for Jesus to snap those puny ropes off His arms - like Samson when they tried to bind him. Only easier. How easy for the One who calmed the winds and waves with just His Word to cause all who came to take Him to fall to the ground, helpless. How easily He could have called twelve legions of angels to His defense (Matthew 26:53) - even one angel, actually, would have been more than enough. It is like a father playing with his child and allowing himself to be subdued. But this is no game. It is the father’s will. It is Jesus’ will. He will ***drink the cup His Father has given Him***. He would lose His life so that ***not one of those His Father has given Him will be lost***. Not one then, not one now.

And so Jesus *freely* allows Himself to be arrested - bound and hauled off for trial. For true freedom is not to act in fear, not to act for self, but to freely follow the Word and will of God. That is the freedom sin has robbed us of. Those who arrested Jesus that night were not the free ones - they were captives of their fears and bound by sin. *And how often do we do the same?* When not in freedom but in fear, in sin, in selfishness, we lash out at others, insist on our own way, and do whatever it takes to get what we want. Half truths, deceit, betrayal, force - and not just against others, but even against our good and gracious God? We are the ones bound, not free.

And so Jesus allows Himself to be bound with us. The Son of God freely enters our world of captivity and fear, of sin and death, in order to free us from those things. To set us *truly* free, as He created us to be.

And He has. And we see that He has, we see this freedom, in the apostles. Before Jesus' resurrection, the apostles are scared and in bondage to their fears, hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews (John 20). But now they are fearless! They preach and then are imprisoned, but their fear is gone. They are released and immediately begin to preach again. And when they are confronted for this, they give the reason for their confidence and freedom. It is not because an angel got them out of jail! It is because ***the God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.***

So here's the reason: not just that Jesus has been raised from the dead, but that He has also been exalted "***as Leader and Savior***" - the word "leader" there meaning the one who is the first, leading the beginning of many to follow; of many who He will save in the same way, as their Saviour. The Old Testament word often used is *firstfruits*. He is the first of the harvest that is still to come, the harvest He is leading.

For Jesus being raised from the dead isn't necessarily good news for us. Good for Him, yes, but what does it mean for us? Peter and the apostles make it clear: As the one who has died and risen to life again, He now has the power over life and death. The Jewish council doesn't. The high priest doesn't. They can kill Peter and the rest, but they cannot take their life. For their life is safe and secure in Jesus' resurrected hands. So they ***must obey God rather than men***. Not because God demands it, but because that is where their life is. They will confess Jesus before the world until Jesus confesses them before His Father in heaven.

That's true freedom! Many think freedom means I can do whatever I want. But when what you want to do is sin, that's not freedom - that's slavery to sin. And sin is what we are all born with. Sin that has corrupted us into something we were never meant to be. But the forgiveness of sins has set us free from that. The new life of Jesus, given to us in Baptism when we die and rise with Him, sets us free from that. We are no longer slaves of sin, to follow our urges and desires. We are free to overcome them and to ***obey God rather than men*** - even when that man is myself and what I think is best.

That's what Jesus did that night in the Garden. He freely allowed Himself to be arrested. He freely would lay down His life on the cross. No one could do that to Him. He did that. For you and me. To set us free. And so free we are, in Him. Not free to sin, but to rise above sin and follow in the way that leads to eternal life.

So *where in the world is God?* With us in our captivity, sin, and death, that we can live

with Him in the freedom of His forgiveness and life. So when you are hard pressed, afraid, or even arrested, you are not alone. And you are not captive. Even in prison, your Saviour is with you. And you are free.

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