

2 April 2021
Holy and Good Friday

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Smile”

Text: John 18-19; Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

I think Jesus smiled on the cross.

Not the whole time, of course. There was much pain and agony. Agony of body with the nails. Agony of soul, being forsaken by His Father and being forsaken and mocked by His people. You heard the reproaches tonight. No smiling there.

But other times, I think He did.

I think He did when the thief on the cross next to Him asked for Jesus to remember him in His kingdom. Words of faith. A sinner turned from his wicked way to see in Jesus his Saviour. Words that were music to Jesus' ears. As beautiful to Him on the cross as the songs of the birds are to us on a warm spring day. So I think they brought a smile - just a little one - to Jesus' lips, right before He assured that newest child of God that He would, in fact, remember him, and he would, in fact, be with Him in His kingdom. A little joy in the midst of the pain.

And then, I think, there was another time. At the end of the long, cruel hours on the cross. After the scourging, mocking, and taunting were past. When it was dark and still and everyone there was just waiting for death, and Jesus said, *It is finished*.

Little children smile when they are finished working on a project or a drawing and bring it to their parents. Look! *It is finished!* School children smile when they finish an assignment or a test, or at the end of a school year. *It is finished!* Adults smile when a project at work or at home is completed. *It is finished!* It is a good feeling to have completed the work you started, you were given.

So, too, for Jesus. All that He came to do for you is completed. There is nothing left to be done for your forgiveness and salvation. For Jesus, it was about a 33 year project. His conception and growth in the womb. His birth in Bethlehem. His flight into Egypt and childhood in Nazareth. Obedient to His parents in every way. His completely perfect life. Then His Baptism and public ministry. His miracles and teaching. Healing, feeding, raising, praying. He knew it would end this way. He kept telling His disciples. No one would take His life from Him - He would lay it down of His own accord (John 10:17-18). Thus the Scriptures said, and thus He would do.

So He allows Himself to be arrested. He showed first that they had no power over Him. At His word they all helplessly fall to the ground. But then He withdraws His power and permits it. The Lamb has to be bound and led to the slaughter. And so like that Lamb, He opens not His mouth. He is silent, not defending himself or accusing others. On Him all the sins of the world laid. On Him on your sins are laid. He is stricken, smitten, and afflicted. By man or by God? Yes. By man in hate, by His Father in love for the world. He is despised and rejected by men, but not by His Father. He is forsaken, but not rejected. For just as at His Baptism (Matthew 3:17), and just as at His Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5), this is His beloved Son, and with Him He is well-pleased. For in all this is the salvation of the world.

He is the High Priest who has become the sacrifice. The Shepherd who has become the Lamb. The one who spared from death all the firstborn of Israel in Egypt is the firstborn slaughtered in their place. No blood would protect Him. His blood would protect us.

He is pierced, not stoned, for He would be lifted up from the earth in His death. For cursed is everyone hung on a tree (Deuteronomy 21:23). He is crushed for our iniquities, by our iniquities. Crushed for every careless word you utter; every lie or word hurled to inflict pain. For every vile, hateful, lustful thought. For everytime you passed by another in need and looked the other way, and for every selfish action. For your heart blacked by sin and evil desires. For your bearing His name and then living like you didn't. For every sin we think no one knows, and that, we think, doesn't hurt anyone. How wrong that is.

So He who was Israel's water in the wilderness is given sour wine to drink. The one who is the bread of life is starved of His life. He who is the Light of the world hangs in the darkness of death. He who clothed Israel for 40 wilderness years is plundered of His clothing. He who gave Israel a home and land of their own is laid in a borrowed tomb.

Now, it is done. ***It is finished.*** The sacrifice, the atonement. He dies, you live. You are redeemed. You are saved. **And He wouldn't have it any other way.** It is worth it, to Him. You are worth it. All the pain, all the agony, all the mocking, the death. If it means life for you, if it means your crushing load on Him not you, if it means that *today, you will be with Him in Paradise . . . it's worth it.* Take all the love of all who love you in this world all together - and this love is more than all that. Far more. Magnitudes more. The love of Father, Son, and Spirit for you. The Father who gave His Son for you. The Son who laid down his life for you. And the Spirit who gives the life of the Son to you. It's all for you. It always was.

Now the promise made to Adam and Eve in the Garden is fulfilled. And as great as this sacrifice, the damage inflicted upon satan is worse. Far worse. Magnitudes worse. And with that, this tree of death has become a tree of life. Life for you.

And so, I think, Jesus must have smiled, when He said: ***It is finished.*** He hangs there

victorious. This is why He came, for this moment. You are His! So He breathes His last, hands over His Spirit for you, and entrusts Himself into His Father's hands.

And because He did, you can. You can breathe your last in confidence and entrust yourself into your Father's hands.

And this, too: *you* can smile. Even, no especially, on this day. This very good Friday.

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