

21 November 2010  
Last Sunday of the Church Year

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Really? Really!”

Text: Luke 23:27-43; Malachi 3:13-18; Colossians 1:13-20

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

***Do not weep for me***, Jesus tells the multitude who followed Him to Calvary. Jesus doesn't want your tears or pity. For His life is not being taken from Him; He lays it down of His own accord. The power of the Roman soldiers and the authority of Pilate were given to them by Jesus, and we could say, for this very purpose - that He die for the sin of the world. That He die for the life of the world.

The idea that if He were really ***the King of the Jews*** that He would ***save Himself*** comes from the fact that this is what earthly kings do - they save themselves, often at the expense of their people. It is what we do. Preferring to serve ourselves, not others. Preferring to save ourselves, not be our brother's keeper. *But not Jesus*. He is not a king who saves Himself, but a king who saves us. Who saves His friends and enemies. He is a true King who serves all people for their good - even when that good meant going to a cross.

On this last Sunday of the Church Year, therefore, the Holy Gospel shows us our king on His throne - the throne of the cross. Do not look for a fancy, bejeweled throne. He who takes a carpenter for a father, a manger for a crib, Nazareth for a hometown, and tradesmen for followers, owns no riches. Actually, that's not quite true. He owns *all* the riches of the world, for He made them all. But He covets them not. He covets only you. Your life, your soul, your good. And so for you He willingly trades all these things. The devil in the wilderness showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and offered them to Him (Matthew 4), but He did not have eyes for these - only for you. For you are His Bride.

Who would not want such a king? Sadly, many. God's own people, in fact. For after He had chosen them, brought them up out of Egypt, kept them safely through the wilderness, and established them in the land He promised to give them - His own people, for whom He had done so much, then said: *We don't want you as our king. We want a king like all the other nations have.*

But even sadder still, after God gave them the king they wanted - His own people then said: *We don't want you as our God*. For they began to worship the gods of the other nations around them. They brought the images of these gods into the

Temple and worshiped as the nations around them did, even to the point of sacrificing their own children.

And then when things didn't go well with them, **they blamed God**. See, they said, and as the prophet Malachi reports, *it is vain to serve God. What's the point? The arrogant are blessed and evildoers prosper. God is blessing our enemies, not us.* At which you can almost imagine God looking at them and saying: *really?*

Who's really the not-good-enough-ones here?

And things haven't changed so much, have they? God is always being accused of not being good enough - by the people of the world, by His own people, even by you and me. When natural disasters strike. When we see evildoers prosper. When we don't think God is blessing us enough, or in the ways we want. When the hard times won't seem to let up.

But who's really the not-good-enough-ones here?

We who serve the false gods of our world and nation - the gods of greed and lust, of power and ease, of rights and privilege. We who blindly walk past our neighbor in need because *I only have eyes for me*. And perhaps the greatest indictment of us: that we often do not even see these sins of ours, but think we're doing okay. Perhaps it was that way in Israel, too. They and us, **we know not what we do**, so blinded are we in our sin.

So what's such a good and gracious and long-suffering God to do with such an evil and sinful world? End it? Well, yes, and that day is coming. But first He will die for it. He will die for you. For your sin and blindness, that you may not die, but live. That you see on the cross what kind of God He really is. That you see that in all things He acts in love. For there He bears your sin and condemnation and dies your death, to rescue you from all these things that you have done, that you deserve, that **you may be with Him in Paradise**. For that is where you belong. In the beginning, your Father created you for Paradise and Paradise for you. And that is still the way He wants it.

And there is only thing for us to say to this. *Really?*

Yes, *really*. For as St. Paul told us, **all the fullness** of our almighty God, who **created all things visible and invisible**, and who continues to **hold all things together**, has come to dwell in the person of Jesus to **make peace** with us. To **reconcile** us who have gone so astray, who have thought such wrong thoughts, who have accused our Lord of not being good enough, who have rebelled and been unfaithful to our Bridegroom time and time again. He **comes to make peace by the blood of His cross**.

And that is the peace we hear from His cross, when He says: **Father, forgive them.** And He does. And you are. For Jesus' sake. Your rejection, your rebellion, your condemnation, swallowed up by His blood on the cross, and His forgiveness given to you here, as you hear His Word of forgiveness spoken to you, as you are washed in the blood of His forgiveness, and as you swallow the blood of His forgiveness in His Supper. And so joined to Him, just as He is risen from the dead, so are you.

Yes, so *are* you, not so *will* you. For even now you are risen from the death of sin to live a new life. For the Spirit of Him who came to dwell with us and die for us now dwells in you. The Spirit of sonship, the Spirit that cries, *Abba, Father* (Galatians 4:6). The Spirit that now causes you to pray, **Father, forgive them**; that enables you to lay down your life for others; that enlivens you to repent of your old self and old ways, for you now see again the truth. Both the truth of your sin and the truth of His goodness and love.

For this, the mocking hurled at Him will be hurled at you; the persecution He received you will receive; the world that hated Him will hate you as well. There will be crosses to bear. But fear not, for He *has come into his kingdom*, and you are never out of His mind. He does **remember you**. And He will remember you when He comes again. He will remember the one He baptized, the one He absolved, the one He fed. The one whose prayers He answered, the one whose tears He dried. The one for whom He died. For He is faithful. And when He said to you, *You are mine* (Isaiah 43:1), He meant it. *Really*.

And so for you, too, it is true: **Today, you will be with Me in Paradise.** For Paradise was created for you and you for Paradise. And *today*, for dying and rising with Christ in Holy Baptism, you have already begun to live in that day which has no end. The day of eternity. The day where death does not have the final word, life does.

For you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, are subjects of a crucified King. A crucified King, who does not save Himself, but who came to save you. And when He comes again for you - be it sooner or later - **He will take you to be with Him in Paradise.** And you will be home. Back where you belong. Reconciled, redeemed, restored. Forever.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

*(Thanks to the Rev. Dr. Rick Stuckwisch for helping me get over the "law hump" in this sermon.)*