

21 March 2012  
Lent 4 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Desecration of Holy Zion”

Text: Lamentations 4; Hebrews 9:11-15; Luke 23:44-49

There is true hope and false hope. Wise confidence and foolish confidence. Good trust and bad trust. In your life, sometimes you put your trust and hope and confidence in the right place, and sometimes in a foolish place. Hopefully, more often in the right place.

*Judah didn't.* Instead of putting her trust, hope, and confidence in the Lord, she put her trust in men and in the things of this world. The worship of false gods had infiltrated the country and lured many people away. The kings and leaders thought they were in charge instead of God, and followed their own ways instead of His. And when push came to shove, when the great and powerful army of Babylon came up against them, they trusted a political alliance with Egypt for their protection. And it was all - all of it - foolish. They got let down and let down hard. Their false gods who had eyes but could not see, ears but could not hear, and mouths but could not speak, did what false gods do - *nothing*. Their kings and leaders crumbled under the pressure. And Egypt stayed home. As Jeremiah wrote: ***Our eyes failed, ever watching vainly for help; in our watching we watched for a nation which could not save.***

And you know the rest of the story - the death and destruction, the sin and suffering, and then exile as prisoners of war. You've been hearing about it in all Jeremiah's Lamentations during this season of Lent. That's what false hope, foolish confidence, and bad trust get you. Judah learned a hard lesson, just as her sister Israel had before her.

It wasn't that Judah didn't want to trust the Lord - I think she did! But it's hard. Those false gods and their worship looked fun! And the kings and leaders seemed smart and able. And the army and chariots and horses of Egypt looked strong. And so it was easy to go that way, and wander away. But without God, they were no match for the prince of this world and the powers of this world. Their sin made them weak and vulnerable and then killed them.

Sin is serious business. There is no wink, wink, nudge, nudge, just kidding, with God. Apart from Him and His forgiveness, there is only what we heard happened to Judah: ***The Lord gave full vent to his wrath; he poured out his hot anger; and he kindled a fire in Zion that consumed its foundations.***

That's important for us to hear, that we do not the same thing, but put our trust, hope, and confidence in the Lord alone, and also repent that we have not always done that. Yes, we too have served false gods - those people or things we fear, love, and trust more than our Saviour. We, too, have followed our own desires and not what our Lord desires. We, too, have turned away.

Not that you don't want to trust in the Lord - I know that you do! But it's hard. Like it was with Judah. Temptations and pleasures are hard to resist. Doubts and fears are hard to avoid. Trials and troubles are never in short supply. And sometimes we hope and trust and put our faith in foolish things. Like Judah.

Because she did, Judah was made to drink the cup of God's wrath. The cup that would make her stagger and fall. And Jeremiah warns those rejoicing over Judah's fall that if they do not repent, that cup shall pass to them as well! He said: **Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, rejoice now you who dwell in the land of Uz; but to you also the cup shall pass . . .** The cup of God's wrath and anger against sin.

That is a good warning for us - to take our sin seriously; that it's no joking matter to God. **But there is good news here for us as well.** For this cup of wrath and suffering and death, this cup that we too deserve to drink because of our sin, **was instead consumed by your Saviour, the Son of God.** Remember when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying on the night when He was betrayed, just before He was betrayed? He prayed to His Father three times and asked: *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will* (Matt 26:39). What cup was that? Your cup. My cup. The cup that we deserved to drink because of our sin. The cup of suffering and death. But Jesus came and drank that cup for you, all the way to its dregs. Every last bit of it. So that you wouldn't have to. He took your sin, He took your punishment, He took your death. That's what you see when you look at that cross and Jesus on it. Your cup.

But also, before He died, Jesus did something else - **He provided another cup for you.** This, too, on the night when He was betrayed, and He took the cup after supper and gave it to them saying: *This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood* (Luke 22:20). *Drink of it, all of you, for this is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out [for you] for the forgiveness of your sins* (Matt 26:28). And so as Jesus emptied and drank your cup, all the way to cross and death and grave, so you now drink His cup, filled with His blood, all the way to life and resurrection and heaven.

So who you gonna trust? Yourself? Your neighbor? Others who deserve that awful cup just as much as you do? Or the One who drank it for you? The One who

created all things, gave you life, and promised to provide all that you need, and who then proved it on the cross! Not much choice there . . .

So let this be your Lenten prayer. That as our faithful high priest, Jesus, prayed from the cross: ***Father, into your hands I commit my spirit***, let that be your Lenten prayer. Not just in death, but in life. In good times and bad, in the darkness and the light. Each day. For your Saviour is trustworthy and true, and all who trust in Him will never be put to shame.

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