

29 March 2024
Holy and Good Friday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Wisdom of God”

Text: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

I don't know if you ever paid much attention to the first part of the first sentence of the Old Testament reading we heard tonight. We hear it every year, but like me, you maybe just skipped over it. Because what comes after it is so vivid, so striking. All that Jesus did. All that happened to Him. The beating, the marring, the man of sorrows. The one wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The one who was made the sin offering. Oppressed, judged, and taken away. But it all starts with this verse, this phrase: **Behold**, that is, look! **My servant shall act wisely . . .**

Wisely. That's a strange thing to say. Not the word many might have selected for that verse! Reckless, maybe. Or foolish. For was it wise for Jesus to provoke the religious authorities? Was it wise not to defend Himself before Pontius Pilate or King Herod? Was it wise to overturn the tables in the Temple? Was it wise to allow Himself to be arrested without a fight? No, perhaps we would say. You don't stick your hand into the snake pit and expect to not get bitten. Or beaten. Or crucified.

But, of course, that's exactly why Jesus did what He did. That the snake, the old evil foe, rise up against Him, and provoke sinful men to do the same. That He be hung up on a cursed tree, crucified. That's exactly what He wanted. To bear the curse, the curse of sin and death, this curse that infected and causes the death of every man and woman and all of creation - to bear that all Himself. That it crush Him, not us. That it curse Him, not us. That it condemn Him, not us. To set us free from that dreadful past, present, and future. So if that was His goal - *and it was* - He did act wisely to get it done.

But that verse in Isaiah means more than that. For to **act wisely** there means to *act in accordance with wisdom*. And that wisdom is the wisdom of God. And that wisdom of God is the Holy Scriptures. So for Jesus to **act wisely** is for Jesus to act in accordance with all the Scriptures, which is to say, to *fulfill* all the Scriptures, from beginning to end. So all that was written, all that was promised, all that was prophesied, be fulfilled. Not one Word of God left empty, but all accomplished. That the promise made to Adam and Eve, and then to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then to David, foretold by prophets like Ezekiel and Micah, foreshadowed in the events told by Daniel, and finally the words of Jesus Himself, all be fulfilled. So that when Jesus utters the word *tetelestai*, **it is finished**, it truly was.

So the wisdom of God is clearly not like our wisdom. For who would do this? What Father would offer up His Son, and what Son would offer up His life, for a world where, Isaiah says, ***all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way***? Reckless, perhaps we would say. Or foolish. But maybe the truth is that we're not as wise as we think . . . Science and the internet have given us more knowledge than ever before, but the more we know, the less wise and the more foolish we become. Because the more we know, the more we do and accomplish, the more advances we make, the more wonders we perform, the more we think we are gods. We're the creators of our reality. We call the shots. We determine the truth. We do what we want. We know what is best. We know how to live! And what a mess we've made.

So into this once-perfect but now messed up world where men think they are god, came the true Son of God. ***And He died for all***, the apostle Paul said to us tonight, ***that those who live might no longer live for themselves*** - might no longer live in our foolishness - ***but [live] for Him who for their sake died and was raised***. That we might, like Jesus, ***act wisely***. That is, act in accordance with wisdom, the wisdom of God, the Holy Scriptures. That we live by that truth, not our own. That we live by those words, not our own. That we live under the One who knows far more than we do, and that we ever will. The One who not only knows what is best, but does it. And does it *for us*. **He dies**.

Reckless? Foolish? No. *Life-giving*. For His death means our life. His captivity means our freedom. His sorrow means our joy. His condemnation means our forgiveness.

So ***for our sake***, the Father made the Son ***who knew no sin, to be sin, so that in the Son we might become the righteousness of God***. The righteousness of God that is ours by grace through faith. The righteousness of God that is not achieved by us, but given to us. Given to us by the One who hung on the cross in our place. By the One who spoke from the cross, *Father, forgive them* (Luke 23:34). He *does*, and you *are*. Forgiven, for Jesus' sake. ***Accounted righteous***, is how Isaiah put it. Which means that in the accounting of heaven, you are counted righteous, your account paid in full. Which is what the word *tetelestai* was used for in the days of Jesus. When a bill was paid in full, the word *tetelestai* would be written across the account - ***it is finished***; paid in full. And since Jesus had nothing to pay, since the Son owes nothing, that was written across your account, in His blood.

So now we hear the story again of Jesus ***acting wisely***. He knew of His betrayal, foretold it, and it happened. He knew of Peter's denials, foretold them, and it happened. He knew of His crucifixion, foretold it, and it happened. None of it a surprise. But you know what else He knew and foretold? That on the third day, the tomb would be empty. That on the third day He would rise. That satan would not have the final word, He would. That death would not have the final word, life would. He who is the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Revelation 22:13). He who is our creator, redeemer,

and sanctifier. He who is our forgiveness, life, and salvation. Yes, He dies our death and lays in our tomb. ***They will look on Him whom they have pierced.*** But so will we! In the resurrection, we will see the nail marks, we will see the where the spear was thrust into His side, and we will *rejoice* to see those marks - those marks not of our sin, but of His love.

Behold, my servant shall act wisely. Tonight is the night of the wisdom of God. Our Lord has been preparing for this night, for His death, all His life. Tonight, we prepare for our own deaths by looking at His. And we'll see that while death is terrible and does its worst, it will not win. It cannot win. For the Son of God, the suffering servant, our Lord Jesus Christ, saves us not just *from* our sins, but saves us *for* Himself. Or as we confess in the Catechism . . . *He has redeemed me . . . that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.* **This is most certainly true.**

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