

3 April 2026  
Holy Good Friday

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“A Hill Worthy Dying On”

Text: John 18-19; Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12

In the Name of (+) Jesus. Amen.

*Is that a hill worth dying on?* You’ve heard that question. You’ve asked it yourself. It means to pick your battles wisely. The cost may be too high; greater than the reward. Is that battle, that argument, that conviction worth the risk of ruining your career, your reputation, a friendship, or a relationship?

Think about all the times you answered that question **yes**, and pressed on. And maybe it *was* worth it. Or maybe later you found it was not. You regretted that decision, and wished you had let it go.

Think about all the times you answered that question **no**, and didn’t fight that battle. Maybe *that* was wise, but maybe not. Maybe you were later filled with regret and wished you had battled.

And how do you make such decisions? Maybe it is wisdom. Or maybe it is your sinful, selfish nature asserting itself. Maybe it is pragmatism. Maybe it is pride or anger or bitterness. But maybe it is because you know the cost of not fighting is too high. That the truth, that the faith, is worth fighting for.

Well, tonight we heard a number of people faced with that very question. And they answered it in different ways and for different reasons.

**Judas** decided that betraying Jesus was a hill worth dying on. And in the end, he did, at his own hand.

**Annas and Caiaphas** decided that crucifying Jesus was a hill worth dying on, even to the point of denying God as their King, and pledging allegiance to Caesar. Not a good choice.

**Peter** . . . well Peter is a mixed bag, isn’t he? At first he decided that defending Jesus was a hill worthy dying on as he drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant. But then later he changed his mind, and confessing Jesus was not a hill worth dying on in the courtyard of the high priest.

**Pontius Pilate** came to the conclusion that giving a just verdict on Jesus was not a hill worth dying on. He knew the truth - three times he said Jesus was not guilty. But the price for that was too high for his career.

And then there was **Jesus**. What did Jesus have to gain by dying on that hill called Golgotha? *Sinners*. Rebellious sinners, careless sinners, deliberate sinners, neglectful sinners, prodigal, profligate sinners, God-denying sinners, God-be-damned sinners, hard-boiled sinners, uncaring sinners, murderous sinners.

*So is that a hill worth dying on? For them? For us? For people like that? Sinners like us? And not just to die, but to die in that way? The most brutal, torturous way invented by man? To be lifted up on a cross to die of exposure, of suffocation? To die a long, slow, agonizing death? Is that really a hill worth dying on?*

And Jesus said: **YES**.

Let that sink in.

For that's the message of this night. The unbelievable, incredible message of this night. That Jesus thought you were worth it. You were worth dying for on that hill. You were worth the pain, the mockery, the shame. Even more, you were worth being forsaken by His own Father, and having His Father pour out His just and righteous wrath against you and your sins on HIM. Which was far worse than the physical pain, mockery, and shame.

And it wasn't a surprise. None of it was. Jesus knew His Scriptures. He knew the prophet Isaiah. He knew all that was said there, and that it would happen to Him. That He would be ***stricken, smitten, and afflicted*** not just by Pilate, but ***by God***. That He would be ***pierced for our transgressions***, and ***crushed for our iniquities***. That His Father would ***lay on Him the iniquity of us all***. He knew it. He knew it all. And still His answer was . . .

**YES.**

One of our Lenten hymns, that we sang this past Sunday, puts it this way: ***Yes, Father, yes, most willingly I'll bear what You command Me. . . I'll do what You have asked Me*** (LSB #438 v. 3).

**YES.**

The apostle Paul would later write: *For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we*

*proclaimed among you . . . was not Yes and No, but in him it is always **YES**. For all the promises of God find their **Yes** in him* (2 Corinthians 1:19-20).

**YES.**

It is the Word of the Gospel.

**Yes**, your sins are forgiven.

**Yes**, you are Mine.

**Yes**, I baptize you.

**Yes**, today you will be with Me in Paradise.

**Yes**, this is My Body, My Blood.

**Yes**, I love you.

**Yes**, it is finished.

**Yes**, *you are worth dying for.*

If you tell me later that you understand that, I will call you a liar. (Lovingly!) For that is love beyond our comprehension. Love not earned or deserved, but freely, graciously given. To you. The love of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Or as another one of our hymns puts it: *Love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be* (LSB #430 v.1).

That's what this night is all about.

But maybe I should change the words of that hymn I just quoted . . . just a little . . . to this: *Love to the loveless shown that they might **loving** be*. For because of the love of God for us, because Jesus said **YES**, Golgotha **IS** a hill worth dying on, **FOR YOU . . . that changes you**. It changes how you answer that question in your own life. Jesus enables you to answer that question differently - not because the others have changed and suddenly become worth it, but because you have changed and now see them differently. As Jesus sees them. And if HE said YES, they are worth dying for, can we give any other answer ourselves? that the love of God shown to us and then through us, change them, too.

So we leave tonight changed. Changed by His love. Changed by His forgiveness. Changed by His death and resurrection. Changed by the gift of the Son of God, who said **YES**, you are worth dying for.

We sit here in darkness now, as we remember what that YES cost Him. But it is not complete darkness. For no matter how dark it gets for us, or in our world, we have always the light of Christ - His YES - to break the darkness, to give us hope. That while darkness will have its hour (Luke 22:53), and sin will have its day, the light of Christ will shine for eternity. For as the book of Revelation tell us, in heaven, there is

no sun or moon, *for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb* (Revelation 21:23). The devil tried to extinguish that light this day. He failed. He thought that doing so was *a hill worth dying on!* And so he will. Forever. Because Christ died on this hill, too. To defeat the devil. To crush his head. And then rise to life again. And because He did, we are forgiven. We are raised. And we will live - *because* of Him, and *in* Him, forever.

Because of this hill, called Golgotha.  
This hill worth dying on.  
For you.