

Midweek Lenten Vespers 1
St. Luke 22:24-32
February 21st, 2018
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

The One Who Serves

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

It is tough to believe that God's love for us is NOT proved in wealth and privilege; in success. God's love for us is proved in His promises fulfilled: Our Lord + Jesus on the tree of the holy Cross, out of the tomb, and into our hearts by way of the mouth in His Body and Blood given in bread and wine. His greatness is in washing us, feeding us, and forgiving us. His love is proved in the quiet things in which He has embedded in His promise: words, bread, wine, water, earthen vessels, tongue-tied and nerdy pastors.

Good theologians—those who study God's Word—are always idealistic. Lutheran theologians are always a little sad. That is what exposure to the Truth does to a person. It makes the falsehood and the darkness we must still endure in this life and world ever more distasteful. As knowledge grows so does frustration. When idealism is sharpened and the will of God more distinctly exposed, then the Church Militant's flaws grow more obvious and disturbing, as does the depravity of our own sins.

There is a temptation to pragmatism—to do some work—to search for greatness where it can be measured and approved in the sight of men so that we might receive some glory for being Christian. But that is to abandon the Gospel. We want to make the Church work, to pack the sanctuary with worshipers, to improve lives, to get knowable answers to prayers, to build something of ourselves here and now that the world will recognize and respect. And in all honesty, this can all be done if you are willing to lie, to strip the Law of its stern killing power and the Gospel of its ridiculously free grace. Scratch itching ears, be what men want you be, look the other way while they commit grievous sin after grievous sin, and you'll never be lonely or hated by the world. You will be considered the greatest of Christians—until, that is, it is too late.

None of those things indicate true greatness. Caesar was wealthy. Islam has converts galore. Any focus upon such things only indicates greed and selfishness. It is the way of the Gentiles; to look for some evidence that the Church is doing "something." We must repent of that attitude. We must return to the Apostles, to their preaching and writing in the New Testament and to the Scriptures of the prophets, which they quote and expound. Follow the fiery example of their faith. Love what they believed. Receive what they taught with joy.

For there is a Kingdom the world does not know. It lives in you. It is the Kingdom of God's grace, the Kingdom ruled through forgiveness, the Kingdom of dying and rising to life again, where a little child leads them and the strong man is ousted by submission to death. Your King—the Lord + Jesus Christ—is greatest because He became the least. He came to us as the One Who would serve us. If it were not so He could not be your King. You would still be lost in your trespasses and destined for Hell's fire. He humbled Himself to the point of death carrying our sins with Him, even though He fulfilled the Law perfectly. He died the most shameful death known to man even though He was innocent. He was numbered with transgressors even though He was without transgression. He did not shrink from His love for His Father and for us. He paid the price for all of mankind. He laid down His life for us and He took it up again to show that the Father accepted His sacrifice on our behalf. He is not dead. He lives and reigns for all eternity. He has satisfied His wrath and His justice for you by making Himself the instrument of His wrath. He became least—He came to be a servant to the wrath of God that we deserve—to make you great—a child and heir of Heaven—and now you become great in His weakness borne in you through faith clinging to His service for you on the cross.

Therefore, on account of your faith in Him, He gladly welcomes you. He accepts you. He names you. For He loves you beyond all telling or imagination. His dying and rising is acted out in you. It began with your Holy Baptism. It will not end until the final resurrection of the body to come. Until, then, you live by faith and trust in His promises that He made to give you forgiveness, life and salvation. There is a feast and kingdom waiting in Heaven for you. But there is also a feast and a Kingdom here hidden from the eyes and wisdom of men. You are an honored guest at this feast, for the only One actually innocent refuses to throw stones. You are His son in whom He is well-pleased. He gives Himself in the bread and the wine, the satisfaction of His wrath, the claim to His inheritance. He unites you to Himself, to His Father, and to His Spirit, to the saints beside you, before you, and behind you, to the saints all over this sad world, and to the saints at rest who sing with angels.

This is what makes one great. Not the wealth, or power of this world, but being in this eternal Kingdom which was won for you and all those who believe by our Lord and Savior's humbling Himself to be our servant; by His serving His Father and us on the tree of the holy cross, so that He might give to a crown of life in Heaven. Soon, my dear friends, we will follow our Lord into Heaven. And we will eat and drink at the table that our Lord has prepared for us and for all the saints in Heaven. What a blessed day it will be! There will no longer be any sorrow and He will wipe away all our tears of joy that we have been rescued from this life of sorrow and been given a place in His eternal mansions for all eternity. O Lord, grant this unto us all quickly. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.