

John 13.1-14.11
The St. John Passion
Midweek Lenten Services
8 March 2017
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Iesu Iuva +

In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We're starting something this year that we haven't done at St. John's for many years. We're not going to have any specific Lenten series with a title and different weekly themes, like we've done in the recent past. Instead, we're going to go "Reformation style" and use the passion history of one of the Evangelists as the basis for our homilies.

This was the regular practice in Wittenberg during Luther's lifetime. And an entirely appropriate practice for the time of Lent. A season dedicated not only to *our* repentance for our many and grievous sins, but to the Lord's great goodness and mercy in taking those sins upon Himself. And paying for them fully by the blood of His holy Cross. And opening the way to everlasting life for His miserable creatures who deserve nothing but death and eternal death. Sheerly out of His grace and mercy.

So there's no explicit, published Lenten theme this year except for: The Passion according to John the Evangelist or the St. John Passion.

But perhaps today's portion of the Passion reading gives us one: "Philip, have I been with you so long, and still do not know me? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father," Jesus said. "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father."

Because isn't that what Lent is all about in the end? Isn't this the real problem? Isn't it the case that there's a solution for virtually every other problem in life except for this one? What the Father thinks of me? In other words, isn't the \$60,000 question: Do I have a gracious Father in heaven who not only cares *about* me, but even cares *for* me?

Now, I want to make it clear: everyone in the world has an answer to the first part of that question. Is there a God who cares *about* me? Even the atheist who denies God. Because everyone has a deep sense, written on his heart as a creature of God: Not only that there is a God, but He cares *about* you. That's what Paul says in Romans 1: "What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them." And Romans 2: "They show that the work of the Law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them." The atheist excuses them.

Do you have a bad conscience? Are you aware of your sins? Are you aware of the fact that the messes in your life are your own fault? And that what you suffer here isn't just dumb luck, but part of the way God created things to be? If you use drugs, you get addicted. And if you get addicted, you act in ways you never would otherwise. And when you act in ways you never would otherwise, you get into big trouble.

That's an easy example. But you can apply it to how it works with all the other sins in your life. You start to lie, and what comes around goes around.

You wander onto the wrong pages on the internet, and it brings trouble to your marriage.

You stop coming to the services of God's house, and you either find yourself either in a crisis of faith or wake up one day to realize you don't even care.

Or you think overly much of yourself. Only to come nearly to blows those closest to you. Like the disciples on the first night of the Passion history when they argued over who'd get the prime seat in the Kingdom of God only to receive a sharp rebuke from Jesus Himself.

That's God caring *about* you. By building into His world the operation of the Law.

And that makes dealing with God tough. Or rather, not *tough*. But impossible. Because your conscience is constantly doing one of two things. Either accusing you. And saying the Father might care *about* you. But given the way you act and think and speak, never *for* you. Or, on the other hand, excusing you. And plunging you headlong into the grievous sin of trusting not the heavenly Father, but yourself, above all things.

And so you're pinned down. Nowhere to turn.

"Lord, show us the Father, and it will be enough for us." Indeed. If only we knew the heart of the Father. If only it weren't such a guessing game. If only I knew in this life I had the security of a loving God and Father. If only I knew for the next life it wasn't just hell. Or absolute nothingness. A fate *worse* than hell. But I can't. He's up there. I'm down here. He's holy, I'm certainly not. He's perfect. Not me. He's all-powerful. I can't even control my own urges. And I'm at the mercy of His whims.

No wonder Philip said, "Show us the Father."

But then comes the wondrous response: "Philip, I've been with you so long, and you still don't know who I am? Whoever's seen Me *has* seen the Father."

And this becomes the theme of all Lententide celebrations: Whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father. When we watch the Passion history unfold before our eyes again, we're seeing not only Jesus, but the Father.

So just look! Just look at the Son! And see the great love the Father has for you! He stoops to clean the mud- and dung-caked feet of arguing disciples. The master serves the servants. Why? Because He loves them. But quite how much they don't know. No. Because "what He is doing now they don't understand, but afterward they will understand." How much He loves them, how much the Father loves them, is gonna become clear only when He says, "It is finished," and breathes out His last breath. And then they'll see His death for what it is: not a death for Himself. But a death for them. That they might live. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

Just look at the Passion history! Just look at the Son! And behold the great love the Father has for you! To crush the serpent's head His heel is wounded by the One who lifted His heel against Him. And He's betrayed into the hands of the authorities. As a criminal. As the chief of sinners. As the only sinner. And put to death. *That's* how His heel is wounded. But it's also how the head of Satan is crushed.

Just look at the Passion of our Lord and see! See the great love the Father has for you! "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and the Father is glorified in Him. If the Father is glorified in Him, the Father will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him at once." The Son of Man and the Son of God comes. And the shame of His holy Cross is His glory. His honor. "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

And His Father's glory and Father's honor. Why? Because just look at it. The Father's glory doesn't consist of making saints holier, but sinners saints. It doesn't consist of making the living live longer, but of giving life to the dead. It doesn't consist of declaring the not guilty not guilty, but of making the Not Guilty guilty, that the guilty might be exonerated. It consists of loving His own to the end. To the bitter end. To the death of the Cross. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

And here, here, is your life's anchoring place. The Son of God took flesh in the womb of the Virgin. He lived a perfect life for you. He suffered bitterly and died innocently for you. He rose again for you. And through it all He had practically no other purpose than this: to show you the Father. To show to you the heart of the heavenly Father. Who loves you so much that He gave His only-begotten Son. That's life's anchoring place. Always. No matter what life dishes out at you. No matter how your conscience accuses. No matter how it excuses. The Lord Jesus suffered and died for you. And if you've seen that, you've seen the Father. Because that's the Father caring not just *about* you, but *for* you.

During this Lent may the Lord grant to all of you to see not only your sins and the death of Jesus for you, but also the heart of the Father. Who loves you and cares *for* you so much that He give His only-begotten Son into death that you might live. God grant it for Christ's sake.

Amen.

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