

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – March 29, 2013

Good Friday - John 19:30 **Names of Wondrous love – The Alpha & The Omega**

Do you know those two words *alpha* and *omega*? Perhaps you recognize them as the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet just as A and Z are in ours. Do you know that those two Greek letters are also one of Jesus' names? In Revelation chapter 22, the Savior applies this name to himself. ***"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End,"*** he says (verse 13). What does this name mean? Why is it such a name of wondrous love for our Savior? And why focus on this name for Jesus on this day we remember Jesus dying on the cross?

Consider how we use those two letters in our language. When a hardware store advertises, *"We have everything from A to Z,"* we know what it means. It's claiming, *"We have it all. Everything you need you can find here. We are all-sufficient."* This claim may or may not be true. But when Jesus says, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega,"* it's true, wonderfully true. He has it all. He is all-sufficient. There is nothing missing. He is all we need for salvation. That's why as we remember this sad and somber Friday when Jesus suffered and died for our eternal good, we will consider this: **Name of Wondrous Love—THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA.**

The sponge soaked with sour wine had just moistened Jesus' parched lips when we hear him speak. ***"It is finished,"*** He says. Although only one word of four syllables in the Greek language, these are words of great significance to the world. Nor are we exaggerating when we call them the most important words in the history of the world. ***"It is finished,"*** Jesus said, not with the whisper of the dying that you have to bend low to hear. No, he spoke, as the gospel writers tell us, with a loud voice so that all might hear. ***"It is finished,"*** Jesus wanted the whole world to know. What was finished? We have to ask. What's the "it" of which he spoke?

Was Jesus referring to his agony and pain? Was death now bringing him sweet relief from the inhumane torture, the hatred and malice that broke his heart? Was it his life to which he was referring? Were his words some salute to death and good-bye to life? To find the answer, we need to listen carefully as our Savior speaks from the darkness on Calvary. We need to look closely at his face. His face, bloody and bruised, is yet bright and at peace. His words are not the words of a man who is surrendering to death, but the words of a soldier who has conquered in the battle. They are the words of a Savior whose mission has been accomplished. They are the words of the Alpha and the Omega whose work is all-sufficient for our salvation.

That's right! With these words Jesus was telling all who would listen, *"I have won. My work of salvation is done. I have opened wide the gates of heaven for mankind. I have kept all of the law perfectly for every person. I have paid for all sins. Not one sin is left, whether seemingly large or small. I have suffered the agonies of hell that were reserved for sinners. I have endured the full punishment and anger of my Father over sin. I have shed my precious blood to redeem all mankind. And now, it—my work of salvation—is completely finished."* Not a single sin in the mountain load on his back was left unpaid. From his cross the Savior could turn his gaze from the first sinner to the last and see no one whose guilt he had not covered.

Don't his words "***It is finished***" display his wondrous love for sinners? The ancient Greeks wrote that one word of four syllables on tax bills to show that they were paid in full. On Calvary, Jesus wrote "Paid in Full" with the crimson ink of his blood on the bill of sin we had run up before God. "*Finished, paid in full,*" he said, "*not one more penny needs to be added.*" In these words we have the summary of our salvation, the truth Paul expressed so well when he wrote, "***There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus***" (Ro 8:1). Because of these words, we see that Jesus truly is the Alpha and the Omega.

One day a man came to the pastor and asked rather sarcastically, "*What must I do to be saved?*" Knowing the man was not serious, the pastor answered, "*It's too late.*" The man became alarmed and asked again, this time more seriously, "*No, no, what must I do to be saved?*" Again the pastor answered, "*It's too late,*" and then added, "*It's already been done.*" Thank God we know our salvation is all done. Thank God we know that whether we call Jesus *Alpha and Omega* or *A and Z*, he is the only Savior we'll ever need.

God's Word tells us here that having victoriously shouted, "It is finished," Jesus "bowed his head and gave up his spirit." How different his dying is from ours. We die because we have to. Our lives are snatched from us. We cannot prolong life for one second more. But Jesus died because he wanted to – for us. He once said, "***I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.***" (John 10). Now he has proved it. Death stood near the scene on Calvary that day, not daring to approach till summoned by Christ. With his work of salvation finished, Jesus was ready to return to the heaven from which he had come. John doesn't tell us the words with which the all-sufficient Savior entrusted his soul into the hands of his Father. Luke does. He records the Savior's confident prayer: "***Father, into your hands I commit my spirit***" (Lk 23:46).

And what about us? Yes, unless Jesus returns for us we too must die. No, we can do nothing about it. There's no putting death off for one second. Nor is it child's play when death's cold hand comes knocking at the door. Death rightly has been described as the king of terrors. What is it that makes death so terrible? It's more than the physical pain and the natural shrinking from such an ordeal. It's more than the tearing asunder of close bonds with loved ones. What makes death so dreadful is the knowledge that a person's soul must stand before the judgment seat of a holy and righteous God.

For us who stand at the foot of our Savior's cross this Good Friday, death has lost its sting. It's like a lion whose sharp teeth have all been pulled. Though death still growls, it can't bite us any longer. Our Jesus has fully paid sin's wage. Now we can fall asleep in Jesus' wounds, knowing that the last beating of our hearts will be a soft knocking at heaven's door. When it opens, we will be home with Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, the One who is all we need for heaven.

This Good Friday we sit beneath the cross of Jesus. That's our Savior dying there. He shows us how to die. When we as God's children must give up our souls, we hand them over to the One who is no stranger or enemy. Instead, we commend our souls into the warm hands of eternal love. The One who is all we need for heaven will cradle us close and carry us home to the rooms he prepared for us on that Good Friday cross. And as Easter followed that first Good Friday, so another glorious Easter will dawn to bring

our sleeping bodies joyful resurrection and endless glory. Because of that all-sufficient Savior and his wondrous love, heaven will be our home.

We may have our doubts about the hardware store that advertises it has all we need from A to Z. I'm sure there have been times when that store has had to eat its words. When Jesus says, "***I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End,***" we can take him at his word. He truly is all we need for salvation and all we need for heaven. As our eyes focus once again this Good Friday on the cross, on Jesus suffering and dying for us, I pray we realize that nothing else is needed and that here we view the most wondrous love of all! Amen.