

1 July 2007
Pentecost 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Don’t Give Up”

Text: Luke 9:51-62 (1 Kings 19:9b-21; Galatians 5:1, 13-25)

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

Give up. The struggle is long and you’re tired, aren’t you? You’re not making any progress anyway. Why beat your head against the wall any longer? Whether it’s with regard to the problems in our church body, or your friend or family member who just won’t listen to you, or our canvassing and festival efforts, or . . . what else? Your words bounce off deaf ears. Your good works are just met with ingratitude or even hostility. All you’re getting for your efforts is heartache and pain. Give up. It’s not working. Give up. Why waste your time? Just give up.

You’ve heard those words, spoken by Satan, to capitalize on your discouragement. To sink you deeper into hopelessness and despair. And how easy those words make their home in our hearts. *How quickly we agree.* Even great prophets like Elijah. How easy it is to just curl up in the caves of our houses and homes and give up. I’ll flip on Jeopardy instead.

Or, if it’s not that voice you hear, maybe you’re more like James and John: Give ‘em hell, Lord! Bring down fire from heaven on those ungrateful wretches and consume them! That’ll show ‘em. Yup, then they’ll see! . . . That’s giving up, too, just in the opposite direction. And you’ve felt that way too, haven’t you? I know I have. That if only our opponents weren’t here, then life would be better. If only he or she would just go away, *then* I’d have peace. They’re just not worth it. Satan likes to whisper that lie into our ears and hearts as well. And we believe it.

And so we need to repent. Of our lack of love, of our lack of confidence in God and His Word, of our vengeance, and perhaps most of all, of our failure to see that if *anyone* should have been given up on, if *anyone* should have been consumed by fire,

it's you and me. For how often has God's Word bounced off our hard heads and deaf ears? How often do we greet the gifts of God with ingratitude or even hostility? How often do we give others heartache and pain? How often is our zeal either too icy cold, or too fiery hot? Thinking too little of others and too much of ourselves? Elijah, James and John, you and me, we're all cut from the same sinful cloth . . . and the truth is, we're not fit for the kingdom of God.

But instead of sending fire from heaven upon us as we deserve, the Father sent His Son. And that Son was not sent into the world to condemn the world, but to save it. (John 3:17) To save a world that still today is not very different from ancient Israel or that Samaritan village. A world filled with "*sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.*" Our Lord didn't look at the world through rose-colored glasses. He knew what He was getting into. That's why He came. Into the Virgin's womb, into Jordan's stream, and as we heard today, "*setting His face to go to Jerusalem.*" He knew what awaited Him there, too. That on the cross the fire from heaven that James and John so wanted to see was going to fall upon Him. He was going to be the sin offering, the guilt offering, the burnt offering for the sin of the world, that shedding His blood and being wholly consumed, His death would mean life for the world.

And that is exactly why He would *not* give up! For He came to **be** what we could not be, to **do** what we could not do, and to make us fit for the kingdom of God by the forgiveness of our sins. No amount of determination or self-improvement on our part could do it. Only His death and resurrection could. Only His atoning death and life-giving resurrection could give life to us who are dead in sin. That we neither cower in our caves of despair, nor lash out in the zeal of judgment – but with new hearts of flesh, live by the Spirit that has been given to us. Lives of quiet confidence and hope, even in the midst of a world of sin and death.

And it is a *quiet* confidence and hope, for that is how our Lord works. For He comes not in the great and strong wind that tore into the mountains and broke rocks in pieces. He comes not in the earthquake. He comes not in the fire. But in the low whisper He came to Elijah.

And He comes into the world not in the flesh of a king or a warrior, but of a

carpenter from Nazareth. And still today He comes in water, words, and bread and wine. And we wonder: *what are these against such great foes?* What are these against the raging winds of the world, the earth shaking hatred and wars, the consuming fires of sin? We think these weapons not as strong as the weapons of the world, *and we are right!* They are not as strong; **they are stronger.** For they are weapons filled with the Word of God, which conquers not with strength from the outside in, but with forgiveness from the inside out. It is not the way we would choose, is it? But that is because the work is not ours, but His. And so it is done in His way, His time, and with His weapons.

And so the Lord tells **Elijah** to get up, get out, and do . . . what? What prophets normally do – anoint kings and prophets and speak the Word of God. Elijah will not conquer or convert the world, but that is not his job. The Lord will do the work. He will *use* Elijah, but He will do it.

And so with the **disciples**. When the Samaritan village would not receive Him, He simply goes on to another village. And the disciples . . . they are to do what disciples do – follow Him. Listen, watch, and learn. They will not conquer or convert the world, but that is not their job. The Lord will do the work He has come to do. He will *use* them, but He will do it.

And so too for **us** today. In lives of quiet (but not silent!) confidence and hope, we live the lives we have been given and produce the fruits of the Spirit who has been given to us. The fruits of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. Through such things we will not conquer or convert the world, but that is not our job. The Lord will do the work He is here to do. He will *use* us, but He will do it.

And though our little fruits may seem like a whisper against the wild winds and the earth shaking tragedies and the furious fires of passion of the world, we remember: so did the execution of three criminals on crosses at Passover time seem like but a whisper in the course of human history. But it is the whisper of God that changes the course of human events. The whisper of God that in the beginning created all things; the whisper of God that from the cross declared “It is finished”; and the whisper of God that proclaimed again to you today: *I forgive you all your sins.* **And that whisper changes everything.** You are not who you once were, but now a child

of God, forgiven all your sins, and given a home in heaven.

And so we do what has been given us to do as baptized children of God. We listen as our Father talks to us in His Word, and we then talk to our Father in prayer. We repent and rely on our Father's love and forgiveness in His Son, our brother Jesus. And we come to our Father's Table to eat and drink the body and blood of His Son, which gives us the forgiveness, life, and salvation we need. All that we need to live in this world as children of God. **And thus strengthened by our Lord we do not give up.** We will not despair, for the work is His; neither will we rage, for the work is His. We speak His Word, we forgive, we serve, we love, and in all those ways proclaim the kingdom of God. Knowing that His kingdom will come. He will *use* us, but He will do it. And so we pray: *Thy kingdom come.* His kingdom of grace now. His kingdom of glory forever.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.