

30 August 2009  
Pentecost 13

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Not Scrapped, but Redeemed”  
Text: Mark 7:14-23 Ephesians 6:10-20

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

Earlier this week, the government’s wildly popular stimulus program called “Cash for Clunkers” came to an end. People were so eager to take advantage of this program to trade-in their gas guzzling car for a new, more fuel efficient one that the program ran out of money - twice. The first time they added more money and extended the program; but now it has come to an end.

But you know, calling this program “Cash for Clunkers” was never really quite right. Because your car didn’t really have to be a clunker to qualify - just a gas guzzler. Some cars that were *truly* clunkers didn’t qualify because their mileage rating was too high, and some cars that looked great on the outside did qualify, because what was on the inside - what made it run, the engine - didn’t match what was on the outside and wasn’t so good.

I bring this up because in the Holy Gospel we heard today, Jesus’ words that say without any doubt: **you are a clunker**. Though you may look good on the outside, though you may not consider yourself one, though others may look like greater clunkers than you - there is no mistaking Jesus’ words today which show what you look like on the inside, in your heart, the engine that makes your life go. It is a dirty, polluted, love-guzzling, sin-belching engine indeed. Just listen again to what He said: **“What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”** Or in other words, when you lift the hood on your life, or to your mind and heart, there is no mistaking it - you qualify. You, my friends, are clunkers.

Now, the thoughts and opinions of the world strongly disagree with this assessment, instead saying that all men are, deep down inside, basically good. That if you dig down deep enough, you will find good, not evil. For look, the world is filled with people who work hard, take care of their families, contribute to society, donate their organs when they die, and lots of other *good* things. And yes, they *do* look good on the outside, don’t they? Just like you often do. But then there is the sin that

keeps being vomited up from our hearts, the engine gunk that clogs our minds - in bizarre and shameful dreams; in vile and hateful thoughts; in angry and biting words; in resentment and jealousy; in judgment and gossip. And it doesn't take much - just a little poke at us can cause all this to rise up, even if we never belch this pollution out into the world in our deeds. But too often we do that too.

Remember: you don't have to look like a clunker to be a clunker. Some do, some don't, but we all qualify. We all deserve to be scrapped.

That is why we prayed in the Introit today: ***Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*** Or in other words: don't scrap this old, sin-polluting clunker; don't trade me in! But create - create from nothing good in me - something good and clean. Give me a right spirit again. Wash me not only on the outside, but on the inside. Restore me to life as you originally created it - also from nothing - in the beginning.

Now, we have no right to pray such a prayer and no reason to believe that God should hear such a prayer from us sinful, polluting clunkers . . . except that this is the very thing He has - in His mercy and grace - promised to do. For He has promised not to trade us in for better models, but instead to send a Saviour. A Saviour to make clunkers into Christians; to take what is worthless and give you value again. Not just a second chance, but a transformation. For second chances don't really change anything, they just delay the inevitable - just as today's shiny new car is tomorrow's clunker.

But Jesus has come to do much more than that. That what now pumps from your hearts be not sin and filth, but love and life. *His* love and life. Given to you. That instead of trading you in, He trade His life for yours. Redeeming you *not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood* of infinite worth. And so to do that, He becomes even worse than a clunker on the cross, there bearing all your sin and shame and dying your death on a garbage heap called Calvary, that that be not your fate. But that you instead, through His death and resurrection, become new. And not just new for a time, but new forever.

And it is in Holy Baptism that that happens for you - that Jesus' cross becomes your cross; that you are redeemed; that you are made new. In Holy Baptism, the clunker in you receives its death, and you are raised and made new, with a new heart and a new life. In Holy Baptism, Jesus creates in you a clean heart and gives you a right spirit - His Holy Spirit - to live in you. That you no longer be who you once were - a clunker - but now live a new life; a holy life; a Christ life. And so for baptized children of God, your sin no longer defines who you are, and the opinions of the world no longer define who you are - your baptism does. For your baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection is your new birth to a new life. A new life defined

now by the Word of God, which declares that you are no longer a clunker, but a Christian.

Now, that doesn't mean you're not going to have your clunker moments - you will! Maybe a lot of them. Certainly more than you want. For your new heart and life is still tethered to your old, sinful flesh . . . until it too dies and is raised anew with Christ on the last day. But it is that old, sinful flesh that caused Paul to cry out of the conflict in him - that he doesn't do what he wants to do, and does do what he doesn't want to do! His old, sinful flesh still often got the better of him, as it does often for us.

That's why Paul in the Epistle today exhorts us to ***“put on the whole armor of God”*** - the armor to guard and defend our hearts against the schemes and attacks of the devil. It is the armor of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, prayer, and the Word of God - for these are the things that protect us from the evil one. For it is not other people in this world who are our enemies, that we need protecting from - not really, no matter what they do to us. It is satan, who attacks Christians in public and in private, in good times and in bad times, in strength and in weakness, even, as Paul says, in the heavenly places, in the church. We are no where immune.

But although not immune, we are safe, in Christ. For to put on this armor is to put on Christ. And to put on Christ is to put on the One who is victorious over satan. And victorious over satan, we are safe. And so in repentance and faith and robed in His forgiveness, we are safe. His work for us not a thing of the past, but an *ongoing* work. Changing the mortal into the immortal, the perishable into the imperishable (1 Cor 15), clunkers into Christians. Not a program for a limited time only, but for a life that will never end.

And so we come and gather here again after another week of clunking; of the sin in our hearts vomiting out in ways we wish it would not. But though that is what you have done, that is not who you are. And so we repent and receive Christ's forgiveness, and we come to His Altar and receive His body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. That in this eating and drinking we be robed again with His faith and love and life. That what is given **into** us be also what comes **out** of us. That we live not as clunkers, but as children, ***strong in the Lord and the strength of his might.***

And receiving such gifts, we then depart for another week in joy and peace. We are new again. His Word has done what it says. His promise is good, His life is sure, His forgiveness is certain. So go in joy, go in peace, go and clunk no more. Be, rather, who you are. For you are redeemed. You are new. You are Christ's.

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.