16 June 2019 St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
The Festival of the Holy Trinity Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

"The God of Life"
Text: John 8:48-59

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

The Jews answered [Jesus], "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

These words come at the end of a long conversation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. It takes place during one of the three great Jewish Feasts each year, the Feast of Tabernacles. So Jerusalem was bursting at the seams. There were throngs of people there. Jesus was teaching in the Temple courts, and so the Jewish leaders use this opportunity to try to discredit Him before the people.

"Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

I used to chuckle at those words. Because what is Jesus supposed to say? *Yeah, you're right. I have a demon. You got me!*

So what's the point? What are the Jewish leaders saying with these words? Well, they're <u>not</u> just saying that Jesus is crazy, or a few cards short of a full deck. Because to have a demon was a serious thing. Such people were powerful and destructive and caused great harm to themselves and the people around them. Having a demon was the invisible taking control of the visible. Another world breaking into this world - and not for good. So by saying Jesus has a demon, what they were saying is this: Jesus is evil. What He says is evil. What He does is evil. He is dangerous to our society. So He cannot be tolerated. You, Jesus, must be removed from society. Whatever it takes.

The eerie thing is: that sounds an awful lot like what many people are saying today. Which, Jesus said, would happen. If they did it to Him, they will do it to you. Think of any of the hot-button issues swirling about our society today - regarding men and women, marriage, sexuality, gender, abortion. States passing laws restricting any of those in some form are being boycotted to force them to change. One presidential candidate is on record saying that being pro-life is the same as being racist - it cannot be tolerated. Traditional, Christian, Biblical morality is being called evil. And we that teach it and hold to it are evil, too. We are dangerous and cannot be tolerated.

A couple of weeks ago Janet was confirmed, and today Ray will be. And part of that rite is to say that they *intend to live according to the Word of God and continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it* (LSB p. 273). Those might not be just words anymore, like they were when I spoke them back in the day.

So what does Jesus say in response, then? To this accusation that He is evil and dangerous? Well, He says three things, the last of which is the most important, since He marks it with His saying: ***Truly, truly, I say to you.*** First, He says, ***I honor my Father***. Second, He says, ***I am not seeking my own glory***. And third, and as I said, most important: ***if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death***.

Now that's quite the claim, coming from a man who is Himself going to see death, and not just any death, but an excruciating, humiliating death on a cross! But that is, in fact, the key to this whole thing.

For first, Jesus *honors His Father* by keeping His Word. All that was written of Him in the Old Testament, all that has been prophesied, Jesus is fulfilling - especially His death on the cross for the sin of the world. Jesus honors His Father by keeping His Word.

And then second, He is *not seeking His own glory* - but His death on the cross is going to show the world the glory of God. The glory of His love and mercy. That you have a God who doesn't demand that you do this for Him, but who does this for you.

And then because of Jesus' death and resurrection, because the creator of life dies for His dying creation, keeping - that is, holding onto, clinging to, treasuring, believing in - His Word, by that Word and promise, *we will not see death*. Because Jesus saw it for you. And so because of Him, joined to Him in His death and then joined to Him in His resurrection, death is now just something we will pass through as well. In Jesus, death in now but the gate to everlasting life (Psalm 118).

Because the truth is that the invisible God is now visible. Another world is breaking into this one. In Jesus. For good. For life.

So just as God created all **life**, giving of Himself and His love . . . Just as He appeared to Moses in the burning bush to bring His people out of slavery and give them **life** again . . . Just as He gave them **life** as He brought them out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, and fed them with manna and gave them water from a rock to drink . . . Just as He settled them for **life** in the Promised Land . . . So that same God is now in the flesh and blood of Jesus, the invisible made visible, another world breaking into this one, to do the same for them.

And just as God gave His Word and promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that they

may have **life**, even though they had no home . . . Just as He repeated those words and promises to David and Solomon, to give **life** to His people through them in their own land . . . Just as He then spoke those word and promises through Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the prophets, to give the people **life** even while in exile . . . So that same God is now in the flesh and blood of Jesus, the invisible made visible, another world breaking into this one, to do the same **for you**.

That's the claim Jesus is making, in fact, when He says: ***Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.*** He is saying that He is God in the flesh. The Creator in the flesh. The life-giver in the flesh. And His Word gives life. The Word spoken, the Word poured, the Word eaten and drunk. And keeping those words, clinging to those words, relying on those words, treasuring those words, you *have* that life that God created for you, created you for, and always intended you have.

Though, like Jesus, it may not be easy. And I know it's not easy for many of you; maybe all of you. You may have a big home, small home, or no home. You may have many and great struggles and trials. You are attacked from doubts within and accusations from without. And maybe you are called evil, too, even when all you're doing is speaking the truth and trying to help.

Because the Jewish leaders were right - in this sense: the Word that you believe, the Word that you cling to, the Word that you speak, the Word of Jesus . . . that Word <u>is</u> dangerous. It is dangerous to sin and our sinful wants and desires, and our efforts to be our own gods and our own masters and do whatever we want to do. It is dangerous to the devil and his kingdom, who doesn't want you to know the truth and who doesn't want you to live, but to die with him forever. It is dangerous to a world that has been marinating in sin for a long time, and so no longer is able to see things as they really are. Like when you've been in a really dark place for a while and then suddenly a bright light is turned on - it hurts, and blinds! You want to get away from it. But the answer is not to turn the light off and go back into the dark, but to leave the light on. Even if it hurts for a while.

And that is, in fact, exactly what Jesus said of Himself at this very festival. A short time before this He had proclaimed: *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life* (John 8:12).

So we shouldn't be surprised if we see things differently than others. If those in the dark call themselves enlightened just because their eyes are more used to the dark than others. But there's only one light of the world. There's only one light by which we can see things as they really are. Only one light by which we know good and evil. And that light is not the word of man or the wisdom of man - as great as those might be. That light is the Word and wisdom of God. And the Spirit of God, who works through that Word, enlightens us to see Jesus and the life He brings and gives.

So when you are called evil . . . when what you say and think and do and believe is called evil . . . when you are threatened and called a Samaritan or a -phobe or a hater or a bigot . . . when you are considered dangerous and intolerable . . . what do you do?

Well, two things. First, speak the truth in love, as Jesus did. Don't turn off the light and let the darkness have its way. Speak, confess the truth, as we will do in a moment with the Athanasian Creed and as Ray will confess. For the Spirit who worked through the Word in you, will work through the Word in others. And know that even if your worldly wealth is taken away, they cannot take your eternal treasure. Even if they imprison you, they cannot take the freedom you have in Christ. And even if they kill you, they can't take your life. For your life is eternal in Christ. All of that was signed, sealed, and delivered when Jesus rose from the dead. For as Jesus said, ***if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death***.

And then this too: hear Jesus' Word spoken to you. His Word which tells you the truth. The truth that you are a child of God. The truth that you are forgiven. The truth that what He has given you no one can take away. The truth of what really is good and evil. The truth of life and death. The truth that here is His Body and Blood to feed and strengthen you in this challenging and confusing world. The truth that gives you life.

For that's really what Holy Trinity Sunday is all about: **life**. The life of God and the God of life. Life created, life restored, life forever. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who want only life for you. Life in communion with your God, life that comes only through His Word. So hear His Word, confess His Word, live His Word. And so give glory to Him who has shown His mercy to us (Introit).

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.