28 June 2020 St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Pentecost 4 Vienna, VA
Confirmation of Joshua Vigil

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"Not by Worth, by Grace"
Text: Matthew 10:34-42; Romans 7:1-13

I'm calling an audible today. Like they do in football. The teams call a play and line up against each other, but then one of them notices something is wrong; the play isn't going to work. So they change it. They call an audible.

I'm calling an audible today. We've lined up to do a confirmation today, of Joshua. We have the kneeler here for him and you may have noticed this rite added to the normal order of service in the bulletin. But *I'm calling an audible today*. Because Joshua is not worthy.

You heard it. You heard Jesus Himself say it. ***Whoever loves father or mother, son or daughter***, anything or anyone, really, in this world is not worthy of Jesus. And then Jesus added this too: ***Whoever does not take his cross and follow me*** - to death! Whoever does not love me *more than their own life* - ***is not worthy of me***.

So how can I let Joshua come up here and say these things today? When he is not worthy. And, by the way, Joshua would agree with me on this. That he's not worthy. He knows it. Maybe he thought he could pull the wool over your eyes. And God's, too.

But no, he knows he can't do that either. Oh, maybe he can fool you all, but he knows that God knows him better than he knows himself. That God knows all the sin that is in his heart. And there's quite a bit in there, isn't there, Joshua? He knows because, as St. Paul said today, the law exposed his sin. When he learned the commandments, he realized there was so much more to them than meets the eye! That he was more dreadfully sinful than he could ever imagine. He actually thought he was pretty good before that! Again, like Paul. Mostly doing good. Mostly doing right. But then he learned how blind he had been. God's Word exposed the depth of his sin.

Yet still, he was going to come forward today and make some pretty bold statements! And I was going to let him! Good thing <u>this</u> Gospel was assigned for today!

But wait . . . what about the rest of you? You're not worthy either. But you've already been confirmed and so you don't have to worry about it, right? Got that out of the way and over with! But all of you who are not worthy of Jesus are going to come forward today as well and expect to receive His Body and Blood in His Supper! And I was going

to let you! Maybe *I should call an audible here as well* and have the altar guild clear the Table . . .

And . . . what about me? My black heart? My hands with blood on them? The people and things I fear, love, and trust more than God and thus sin? *What about me?* I was going to put these filthy hands on Joshua's head and confirm him? Really?

So *I'm going to call an audible today* and not confirm Joshua . . . not because he is worthy. **I'm going to confirm him because of grace**. Because what is happening here today is what happens here every week: **a gracious God giving gifts to unworthy sinners**.

Now, some think this was an audible called by God. That when Adam and Eve fell into sin, *God* was the one who had to scramble and call an audible - His original plan was no longer going to work. But no. The God who knows our hearts, the God who knows everything, knew this too. And planned for it. Planned to give His Son for the life of the world. His *most* gracious gift to us unworthy sinners.

At this point I am often asked why God, then, created at all, if He knew we would just sin and ruin it all? And while God hasn't told us the answers to all our "why?" questions, I imagine the answer would be along the same reasons as why we plant gardens even though we know there will be weeds. Why we have children even though we know they will rebel and be disobedient. Why we get married even though we know there will be disagreements and fights. Because *God so loved the world . . . He gave His only-begotten Son*. Because God is love. And love gives. So yes, weeds grew in God's perfect garden, His children were rebellious, and His Bride fought against Him and was unfaithful to Him. And God loved through it all. He didn't like it! But He loved them. And He loves *you*.

And this, too, Joshua learned. This is who God *is*. That from first to last, our God is a gracious God, a giving God, a gifting God. Creation a gift, life a gift, faith a gift, prayer a gift, baptism a gift, the Supper a gift, and today, confirmation a gift. Because not one of us is worthy. As we heard and spoke at the beginning of the liturgy this morning: *If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness . . .*

Forgiveness. Not getting away with our sin and unworthiness, but having our sin and unworthiness taken by Jesus and placed upon Him and having Him pay the price for it - with His life. And then having the blood He shed **wash us clean** from our sin and unworthiness, to make us right again. Righteous. Just. Justified. By Him. Back to the way it was in the beginning, that it may be that way again in the end.

Without Him, without His gifts, on our own, the only thing we can do is keep digging our

holes, our debts, our graves, deeper. We need someone to not only pull us out of those graves, but fill in our graves - and so Jesus did, with His own body. And then He pulled us out with Him in His resurrection. That we no longer breathe the stale, poisoned air of death, but breathe the breath of life, by the Spirit Jesus gave, gifted, breathed into us through His Word. A *new* life, a *different* life, a *godly* life, begun now, that will last forever.

And Joshua knows this new life isn't going to be easy. As much as we want peace in the world - and want Jesus to give it to us! - the reality is often the opposite. The sword of God's Word, God's truth, isn't popular, and causes division. *Even in families*. It always has. Even a quick read through the Bible reveals that the Bible is not a peaceful book! There is sin, rebellion, death, and division everywhere! *Even in families*. Sinners are going to sin and no worldly peace is going to last. We keep trying and failing. Just take a look around: from the Middle East, to North Korea, to the strife in our own country. It's like an earthen dam - plug one hole and another will soon take its place.

So instead of leaving peace up to us, our Lord came to do it. But one person at a time. One baptism at a time. One absolution at a time. One Body eaten and Blood drunk at a time. To do not worldly peace, but His peace - the peace of forgiveness - a gift, from Him to you. And at peace with Him we can be at peace with one another. But it is gift. Peace is not something we can do - not lasting peace, anyway. It comes from the Prince of Peace, born in the manger, crucified on the cross, raised from the dead, coming now in Word and Sacrament, and coming again in glory. That is our ***reward*** when we ***receive*** those Jesus sends to us - the gift He gives us through them. The gift you receive here through the unworthy servant God put here for you.

Joshua learned that, too, that pastors are just as sinful and unworthy as the next guy. And this pastor not only taught him that in word but also in deed, right Joshua?! But Joshua learned that when these filthy hands are placed on his head, when these sinful lips speak absolution, when these blood-stained hands put the Body and Blood of Jesus to his lips, something truly extraordinary is happening! The Lord is giving him perfect gifts through an imperfect man. So he will believe - and *receive* - what he hears, not what he sees. And so ***he will not lose his reward***.

And so for the rest of you as well. A confirmation is truly a day to rejoice - not in what Joshua has accomplished, but in the work of our Lord in him. And you. It is a day to remember that our Lord is faithful to all His promises, and that the work begun in Joshua in baptism our Lord has continued to work in him. And you. And to remember, too, that there is joy not only here, today, but also in heaven - for all of heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents and receives the gift of forgiveness and life from our Saviour.

So Joshua, yes, grab your hymnal and come up here! And as you renounce the devil, and all his works, and all his ways, as you confess the faith of the Church in our gracious

triune God, and as you confess your intention to continue in this faith and in this church even in the face of death, let the words you will speak sink in: *I do, by the grace of God*.

So, I guess this really wasn't an audible at all, but the way it always is. Pure gift. Pure grace. The grace of God, the gift of a Saviour, and a Spirit of forgiveness and life, for unworthy sinners. Gifts that will never let you down.

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