

12 June 2022
Festival of the Holy Trinity

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Audacious!”

Text: John 8:48-59; Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Acts 2:14a, 22-36

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

Jesus makes an audacious claim: that He is God. The only God. The one true God. The God of the Old Testament. The great I AM who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. The God who visited and spoke to Abraham and promised him a son. The God who existed even *before* Abraham - the God of the Tower of Babel, the God of the Flood. The God of Proverbs, the master craftsman who created all things. The God who gives life. The God who is able to rescue us from death. That’s who He is. In the flesh.

No wonder they thought He was a Samaritan - an out-of-his-mind half-breed. No wonder they thought he had a demon. Sure, Jesus did a lot of good things. He knew His Old Testament. He taught with authority. There was something about Him. He healed the sick, even in the next chapter of John, a man born blind. No one had ever done that before. But CS Lewis was right: You can’t call Jesus just a “good man,” despite all the good He did. He was either insane and dangerous, deceiving people and misleading people, claiming for Himself audacious things . . . or He was who He said He was.

That’s what the Jews were grappling with. They couldn’t, wouldn’t believe that He was God in the flesh. God can’t look like that. God can’t be like that. God is the God of Mt. Sinai - awesome and fearsome. God is the God of the Tabernacle and Temple - holy and separate. You need priests and sacrifices and blood to approach God. He doesn’t just walk up to You on the street in Jerusalem or Judea or Galilee and shake Your hand! He doesn’t just walk into your synagogue or Temple one day and start teaching! He doesn’t sit with you in your house and eat with you. Everyone knows that! Jesus is *more* than a few cards short of a deck. More than a few eggs short of a dozen. Jesus is nutso. And dangerous. That’s why He had to be crucified. To protect the people. To protect the nation. To protect their religion.

Interestingly, and maybe ironically, today, things are exactly the opposite. Today, in our be-whomever-you-want-to-be, think-whatever-you-want-to-think, world, Jesus would fit right in! If men can be women, girls can be boys, and if you don’t like those options you can invent your own gender, whose to say Jesus can’t claim to be God. Let Him be! He not nutso. In fact, if you call Jesus that, or anyone else that, if you say they’re wrong,

you're the dangerous one! You must be crucified . . . or cancelled, or deleted, or deplatformed. We must protect people and society and our children *from you*.

Now that sounds like it should be good news for us, for the church. At least the part about Jesus. For that's what we say. Jesus is exactly who He says He is - the one true God. The eternal Son of the Father. The one who laid down His life for the life of the world. Jesus is not crazy for saying these things. In fact, as we just confessed in the Athanasian Creed, you must believe this or you cannot be saved. Just as you must, we are told, believe this man is really a woman, this girl a boy, or you cannot be part of society today . . .

Oh, but you can't say that either! About Jesus. That you have to believe Him. You see, some things you have to believe, but some things you cannot believe. Some people are who they say they are, but some people aren't. You have to accept some but you can't accept others. And when what you have to believe and what you can't believe keeps changing . . .

That's why something like the Athanasian Creed - and the Nicene and Apostles Creeds, too - are important and valuable. *They don't change*. This is the catholic faith. Not the Roman faith, but the universal, whole, faith. The faith the Church has been confessing for centuries. The truth and faith that was foretold in the Old Testament, fulfilled by Jesus, and now confessed by the Church. So it's universal across place and time and cultures and languages. And today, we're not saying anything new. We're simply taking our place in the long line of people from Abraham and even before, confessing this faith, this truth. **That Jesus is exactly who He said He is:** the one true God, the Saviour of the world.

Which is exactly what Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, as we heard today. That ***Jesus is Lord and Christ***. This man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Lord, the God of the Old Testament in human flesh. This man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Christ, the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world. And how do we know this? Not just because He thought He was, or said He was, and not just because I feel it in my heart, but because this man, Jesus of Nazareth, who you all thought nutso and dangerous and so crucified, God raised from the dead. Which is exactly what He said He would do and what was said would happen in the Old Testament. Now, if this man Jesus was misrepresenting God, telling lies about Him, and leading people away from the true God and into hell, would God have rewarded Him and allowed this ruse to go on by raising Him from the dead? Just produce the body and/or bones of Jesus, and Peter and the others and Christianity goes away, just like all the other movements with those who claimed to be messiahs. But if you can't . . .

But that was a tough crowd that Day of Pentecost when Peter and the others preached like that. It is a tough crowd today. That Day of Pentecost people from all over were gathered in Jerusalem, with all kinds of ideas and beliefs, just like there are today. But now, just as then, there is only one truth, not many truths. One God, not many gods. One Saviour, not

many saviours. Peter and the others stood up and confessed that. Which took guts! Especially with the horrors of the crucifixion still fresh in their minds. And many do so today, even with the horrors of modern-day martyrdom and persecution and shunning fresh in the news and on the internet. Which takes guts - guts which really can only be attributed to one thing - one *person*, actually: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who was given to Peter and the others that Day of Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit who is given to us today. The Holy Spirit who points us to Christ and enables us to believe that **He is who He says He is**. And not just the Saviour of the world - *your* Saviour and *mine*.

So the real miracle - or maybe better to say, the *greatest* miracle - on that Day of Pentecost wasn't the ability to speak in tongues or do other cool things, but the faith and trust given to Peter and the others, and to the three thousand who believed and were baptized. And the faith and trust the Holy Spirit is still giving to us today. The Holy Spirit who takes us to the Son who takes us to the Father who sent the Son who sent the Holy Spirit. The whole Holy Trinity working for us, to save us. The Father who gave His only-begotten Son for you, the Son who laid down His life for you, and the Spirit who takes all that Jesus did and gives it to you. All three necessary and important. Which is why the Athanasian Creed says this is necessary to believe. For no Father, no Son. No Son, no Saviour. No Spirit, no faith. But all of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for you and working for you, that's the Christian faith. One God, three persons. Or as we said in the Introit and prayed in the Collect: a Holy Trinity, and an undivided Unity.

And that faith and trust, given to Peter and the others, and to the three thousand who believed and were baptized, it was something you could *see*. Peter and the others boldly stood up and confessed in the same city that had just crucified Jesus. The three thousand boldly confessed their sins and were baptized in the midst of others who undoubtedly ridiculed them. For this faith, it doesn't just live in you, it works *in* you, and *through* you, and *out* of you. It changes you. As Jesus once said, a good tree bears good fruit. An apple tree makes apples. And a Christian does Christ. What He did, you will do. Not perfectly, of course! You're still a sinner who struggles with sin and always will, until the resurrection. But you'll begin to do those things, and increase in them. You'll love as Jesus loved, forgive as He did, maybe even lay down your life for others. Not to earn anything. Jesus has already given you everything! But because that's who you now are. A child of God. A new person, with new thoughts, new desires, new loves, new faith, new life, new hope, new confidence. Because you *are* new. Dying and rising with Jesus in your baptism to live a new life. To do those good things the Athanasian Creed also spoke of - again, not to earn life, but that reflect the new life you've been given.

But those good things are not just what we normally think of when we think of good works. They are that, but more. So a good thing you now do is confess your sin and receive forgiveness. A good thing you do is hear and read the Word of God and pray. A good thing you do is come to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus here with your brothers and sisters in Christ. These are all good works, too, because they point to your

Saviour and all the good He has for you. They show and proclaim to others the good that is here for them, too. A good God who is not just somewhere far, far away in heaven, but a good God, a triune God, who as Jesus claimed, is here for us, gooding us. With a good that *doesn't* change. Which, in the midst of a world that is constantly changing, is the firm and solid foundation we all need.

So a Church Year that began with the promise and birth of our Saviour has come full circle to that Saviour's death, resurrection, and ascension for you. Your sins are forgiven, you have a new life, and the Holy Spirit is leading, guiding, and enlivening you. You are a child of the Father, in the Son, by the working and power of the Holy Spirit. Some may think that an audacious claim, one that makes *you* nutso and maybe even dangerous. And maybe they'll treat you that way, as they did Jesus. But even if they kill you, they can't take your life. That is safe in Jesus. You died with Him, you've risen with Him, you're fed by Him, and you will live with Him forever. So be audacious! Be bold and confident in your words and deeds. ***Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day***, and you do, too. And whether or not the world glorifies you, Jesus will. With a glory that - unlike the world's - doesn't come and go with the latest fad, internet meme, or viral video, but lasts forever.

This is the catholic faith, which you believe, and *are* saved.

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.