

29 May 2022  
Easter 7

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Come, Lord Jesus!”

Text: John 17:20-26; Acts 1:12-26; Revelation 22:1-20

**Alleluia! Christ is ascended!** [*He is ascended indeed! Alleluia!*] **Alleluia!**

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

The church is a mess. She is fractured. The number of different denominations and independent churches is in the thousands. She has been rocked by scandal after scandal - financial, sexual, and others. Unbelievers look at the church and see division, turmoil, confusion. They see a church that has lost her way. A church that follows the culture instead of leading people to the truth. A church that has lost her voice and instead of faithful proclamation parrots the latest fads, flights, and fancies of men. Not all churches, of course. But those outside the church make no distinction. We're all the same to them. A mess.

*And we add to that mess.* When we don't act very Christian. When we court the favor of men instead of seek the blessing of God. When we who bear the name of a loving Saviour hold grudges and refuse to forgive, fail to love, and love what we shouldn't. When we remain silent when we should speak, and speak when we should remain silent. When what we believe and how we live look as different as night and day. What's a world to think?

And yet as great a mess as the church may be, the church is beautiful at the same time. With the beauty of holiness. Not because we've made her holy - clearly we haven't, we can't, and we never will! She is holy because Jesus has washed His Bride, cleansing her with His blood and making her spotless, without stain, wrinkle, or blemish (Ephesians 5). He welcomes His prodigal Bride home with His restoring forgiveness. Now clearly, this is an article of faith, not of sight. I *believe* in - not see - one, holy, Christian Church, we say in the Creed.

If that is so - and it is - then you, too, are beautiful, in the eyes of your heavenly Bridegroom. When He looks at you, He sees not your great and many sins, your failures, your shortcomings, your weakness. He sees His beloved. He sees the one He traded His life for. He sees a righteous one, for you bear His righteousness. His gift to you. Even if you don't feel holy and special, you are. Even if you don't look spotless and perfect, you

are. For Jesus has made you so. This, too, then, clearly, not of sight or sense, but of faith.

But now this beautiful Bride lives in a world once created good but now a mess, too. A world filled with war, hatred, death, selfishness, and greed. A world of lust, not love. A world which devours, uses, abuses, and has become a mere shadow of the perfection it once was. A world that doesn't ask what is good but what is legal, and then shapes that according to its own desires. A world that doesn't know beauty anymore, only its own ever-changing version of pretty and sexy. A world where technology may be advancing but morality is decaying. A world where technology meant to unite instead divides. A world not evolving and getting better and more united, but devolving into a chaotic confusion. And we add to this mess, too, though we should know better.

No wonder Jesus prays for His Church, as we heard today! *That we may be one*. Not just united, *but one*. Not just co-existing, *but one*. Not just many parts stuffed together, *but one*. Not with a oneness of our own making, which is no oneness at all, even though we may call it that - but **a oneness in Him**. That united to Jesus we be united to one another. That what unites us be not what we happen to have in common now, for a time, but that we are united in His Body. People with nothing in common but sin, now united in forgiveness. Each of us united to Jesus in Baptism makes us far more than mere acquaintances, but family. Brothers and sisters in Christ. *Perfectly one* in Him.

So in this world that seems more and more to be spinning apart and falling apart, in the midst of this division and mess, Jesus is gathering and uniting us through His Spirit. Bringing young and old, sinners of all shapes and sizes, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, people of all different ethnic groups, together, here, in His Church. And making us one. Not with a unity like after tragedy, which vanishes with the next controversy or news cycle. But truly one. A oneness for time and eternity. His prayer being answered.

And He does that through His Word. The Word preached and given in water, words, and bread and wine. That Word makes **one** out of many, brings order out of chaos, speaks only the truth, and cleans our messed up lives and world with His forgiveness. All of us baptized into **one** Saviour. Many grains baked together in **one** loaf. Many grapes crushed together into **one** cup. Just as all our sins heaped together on **one** Saviour, on **one** cross, in **one** atonement. So that we can sit here today a speak with **one** voice, confessing not many truths but **one** truth, and praising **one** God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And that is a gift. A gift we should not consider lightly. A gift Jesus laid down His life for, to provide that gift for the world. For you. And then a gift the apostles and martyrs laid down their lives for, because nothing in this world could compare to it. The oneness, the love, the forgiveness, the hope we have in Jesus.

That's the gift *Joseph* - also called Barsabbas, also called Justus - and *Matthias* received, that enabled them to join the twelve. These two, as we heard, were not newcomers, but

had accompanied the twelve through all the ministry of Jesus, beginning from His baptism by John until His ascension. They heard His teaching. They saw His miracles. They saw Him dead. They saw Him alive and resurrected. So they were and could be witnesses. For they were eye witnesses and ear witnesses.

But this was no competition. There was no campaigning. There would be no victory party. When the lot tumbled out of that jar with Matthias' name on it, **it was his death sentence**. Matthias knew it. He had heard Jesus say that. That if the world hated Him it would hate them. That His persecution would be turned upon them. That those who killed them would think they were offering service to God! And it all happened. Matthias knew it, and still let his name be put into that jar! . . . *Would you?*

But what Matthias (and Joseph-Barsabbas-Justus for that matter, too) knew, that enabled him to do this, was that **he had already died!** Baptism joins us to the death and resurrection of Jesus, makes us one with Him. So His death is our death, His resurrection our resurrection. In baptism we already have a new life that death cannot end. So a life we *can* lay down for others.

If life in this world, for the few years we have it, is all we have . . . and the things of this world, whatever we can get and accumulate for ourselves, is all we have, or could hope to have, then yeah, we gotta hang onto these! Then this world is a competition for life, for the most, for the best. And that's why it's such a mess. People fighting for their lives. Billions all in competition with each other.

*But what if we weren't?* What if it wasn't about what we could get, but what we are given? About gifts? Gifts enough for all. Life enough for all. Would that change things? Of course it would. **And it has changed you.** Oh, don't get me wrong - you're still a mess! :-) As am I. And we still live in a messy church and a messy world. And yet in the midst of this messy chaos, there is also a **oneness**, a unity, that we have. In Jesus. A **oneness** that could only be a gift. A **oneness** given in love and forgiveness. A **oneness** that makes no earthly sense, and yet is true. A life not of competition, but to live together, with our Saviour and with one another. A life that even when we go our separate ways today, *we're still one*. A life that even when our loved ones pass away, *we're still one*. That's remarkable. And it's not only what Jesus prayed for, it's what He did. He gave you that life, that **oneness**.

That life, that oneness, that hope, that gift, has been our joy this Easter season now coming to a close. Not just Jesus for me and my life, but Jesus for us and our life. Together. One. Baptized together. Living together. Confessing together. Feasting here together. Until the day we see what John saw, what we heard in the reading from Revelation today, the last chapter in the Bible: ***the water of life, the throne of God and the Lamb, the tree of life, the face of God.*** Quite a different reality than what we have and see today.

And so until that day, we pray what Jesus prayed, *that we may be one*. That all may be one. And we pray ***Come, Lord Jesus!*** Come to those who do not know you *and make them one with us*. Come to those who have fallen away *and make them one with us*. Come to those who have erred or are straying *and make them one with us*. Come to us and keep us one with you and with one another. Come again in your glory and take us - as one - to that home; our eternal home. Where there is no mess, no sin, no evil - only life. Life eternal. Life as **one**. Come, Lord Jesus! Come.

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.