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Easter 7

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“What I Know I Should, He Did!”

Text: 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11; Acts 1:12-26

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.

Tell me if this sounds familiar . . . there’s what I should be doing, and there’s what I am doing. I should be doing chores around the house, but instead I’m watching the game, or binge-watching that show everyone’s talking about. I should be doing schoolwork, but instead I’m playing video games. I should be exercising, but instead I’m grabbing that extra snack or nap. You too? It’s easy, until you run out of clean dishes or clothes, until your undone schoolwork is due, and until the doctor gives you the bad news . . .

Well, Peter mentions a few things like that for us today. Things we should do, but maybe don’t do. ***Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God***, he says . . . but how often am I proud instead, think that I’m better than others, and that God should take notice of me, that I deserve good stuff from Him. ***Be sober-minded, watchful of the devil, and resisting him*** . . . but how often am I lazy-minded, distracted, and instead of resisting his temptations so easily fall back into those sins which trip me up time and time again. ***Cast all your anxieties on him*** . . . but how many hours and days do I spend worrying and fearing instead.

And how about some more . . . I know I should read the Bible more. I know I should pray more. I know I should help more. I know I shouldn’t take my spiritual life for granted. But . . . You too?

It would be better to do what we know we should. We all know that. And yet . . .

So as we come to the end of this Easter season, we hear once again **where to put our hope** - and it’s not in us! And it’s not in your pastor, or in your parents, or in the government, or in the courts or anyplace in this world . . . There’s only one place. Only one for whom what He *should* be doing and what He *did* do lined up. Only one for whom we heard these words today: ***I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do***. Of no one else is that true **but Jesus**. And He did it *for you*. To give you hope. To give you life.

That's what we heard from John today, as he recorded the words that Jesus prayed in the Garden right before His arrest. Everything He did was for two reasons: to glorify the Father, and to save you and give you life. Which, you may have noticed, is fulfilling the First Table of the Law (loving God) and the Second Table of the Law (loving your neighbor). Jesus knew what He should do and had to do, and did it. So that in the end, there would be no bad news for us; no *if only you had done this* for us; no failing grades for us. That what we need, we would have. Because of Jesus' work.

Or, to think of this using those things Peter mentioned today . . . ***Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God*** . . . Jesus did that. The Son of God born a son of man, the Creator born as a creature, the Law-giver born under the Law. He humbled Himself, obeyed His Father's will. He was ***sober-minded, watchful of the devil, and resisting him*** . . . in the wilderness, when Peter rebuked Him for talking about the cross, and even on the cross when Satan tried to get Him to despair and doubt. And then Jesus also ***cast all His anxieties on him***, on His Father . . . doing so, praying so intently in the Garden, in such agony, that His sweat was like great drops of blood. But He was strengthened, to finish the job, to go to the cross to glorify His Father and save you.

For Jesus knew that following His death would be His resurrection and ascension. We heard those words in His prayer today: ***I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you***. And then what would happen? To them? To us? When pride would rise up again and makes us think more highly of ourselves than we ought, and rely on ourselves and what we can do instead of Jesus. With the devil still ***prowl*** ***around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour***. With the anxieties, cares, and fears of this world and life piling up and becoming a crushing burden. With the false catechesis of this world drumming in our ears and the allures of sin tugging at our hearts. When hatred, suffering, devastation, and death are what we see and hear all around us. When the disciples would look around and - unlike those three years with Jesus - it seemed as if God was so very far away?

Any parent can tell you of these concerns. You have your children for a short time and then ***they are in the world***. And what will happen then?

So in these last hours, Jesus prays for us. He entrusts us to the only one who loves just as much as Him - our Father in heaven. ***Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one***.

So two things there. First, Jesus prays, ***keep them in your name***. Keep is what you do with something that is very important to you, very precious to you, very valuable to you. You keep something valuable in a safe, you put something precious in a special place, that it not be damaged or lost. So when it comes to you, what safer or more special place can there be to protect and keep you than the name of God? The name given to you and put upon you when you were baptized. The name proclaimed to you here. The name you

continue to be blessed with. The name which says who you are: a child of God. **Keep them in your name.** Keep them knowing who they are and whose name they bear, in this faith.

But keeping like this may include suffering! Sometimes that is exactly what we need when we're not doing what we know we should be doing, or not being who we know we are. Suffering can take away what shouldn't be in our life and turn us back to who should be. Or it can confirm us in doing good, if that suffering comes because we are following God's Word. So suffering can be good. So, Peter says, *rejoice if you share in Christ's sufferings. If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed. If you are insulted for the name - the name of Christ - you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. Therefore, Peter says, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. . . .*

So that's first: keep them. And then Jesus prays this: **Keep them in your name . . . that they may be one, even as we are one.** Keep them, but also keep them *together*. For faith unites, sin divides. We need each other. Satan is constantly trying to divide Christians, divide churches, divide families, divide nations, divide communities, divide marriages. We sin in the dark, we sin alone, and then our shame further divides us. We avoid others, we avoid church. So Peter said ***your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour***, because that's how lions do it - they divide - they divide one from the flock or herd and then catch it and devour it. That's what satan wants to do to you, too.

So, Jesus prays, not just keep them together, but ***that they may be one***. Because you can't divide what's one. Those of you who didn't like fractions in school, this is good news for you! There are no fractions in heaven! Make them one, Jesus prays to His Father, ***even as we are one***. One like the Trinity! Indivisible, inseparable. One with the Father as we are one in the Son. Baptized together as one **in** Jesus, fed together as one **by** Jesus. That we not be divided from Him or from each other even for a moment. That we may be one with Him now, and one with Him forever. One with the one who did all that was given Him to do, so that we have all we need through Him.

And we see this playing out in the First Reading for today from Acts. The church is small, but together - at this time, about 120, we are told. The one who had been divided from them in sin, Judas, had been consumed by the divider, the evil one. But they are going to fill his place in the twelve. Not just because twelve is a good number or because the Scriptures said so, but because the world needs to know where there is hope. The world needs to know of the one who did all He was given to do, forgives our failures, and fills up in us what we are lacking. The world needs to know the tomb is empty, the dead one is alive, and there is hope for us who die. The world needs to know, and WE need to know! Matthias is chosen because he saw, he heard, and he can testify of Jesus.

The testimony that has gathered us here today. We're not here because of anything we've done - we've already established that more often than not, there's what I *should* be doing, and then there's what I *am* doing. My hope is not in me! We're here because of everything Jesus did, and everything He is still doing through the ministry of His church and His Word and Sacraments. Adopted in baptism, washed in forgiveness, fed with His Body and Blood, strengthened with His word and promises - that's us. Kept in His name and gathered here in Him as one. Without Him, where would we be? But with Him, we are here. And with Him we will be forever.

So as we come to the end of this Easter season, we have seen the tomb we have created with our sin, and we see the life Jesus has provided with His resurrection. *And we have hope.* Hope not just for eternal life, but for this life, too. That those things I know I should be doing, *I can do.* Not for myself, but for others. For Jesus has given me all I need, so I can help and provide for others. My family, my co-workers, my friends, my church. I can pray, I can be there for them. I can repent. I can forgive. I can speak in love and love in deed. I can humble myself for them and let my Father take care of all those cares, worries, and burdens weighing so heavily on me. For He will. He has, and He will. He'll do it better than I could anyway. So I'll do what I'm given to do, and if suffering comes my way, or your way, we'll thank God for that, too. And look to the one who makes us one and keep us in His name.

And then Peter concludes with great words to end this Easter season: ***And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.***

For yes, Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*]
And yes, Christ is ascended! [*He is ascended indeed! Alleluia!*]
And one with Him, *so are you.*

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.