

15 June 2025
The Festival of the Holy Trinity

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“All That Really Matters”
Text: John 8:48-59; 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 wants the Jews to know who He is. Not for His own glory and honor. But to save them.

It would have been easier for Him not to. To just walk away from them. To not bother with the arguments. To not bother with the insults. To not bother going to the cross. If they don't want Him, fine. Go to hell.

But that's not who Jesus is. That's who we are. At least, sometimes. People argue with us, insult us, bother us, inconvenience us, hurt us - fine. I don't need this. I don't need you. And we walk away. It's easier. Ever done that? I know I have.

But thank God . . . *thank God* that's not what our God does! Though He had plenty of opportunities to do so. From Adam and Eve, to the days of Noah, to rebellious Israel, to the Jews of Jesus' day, and just about every day in between! It would have been easier for God to just walk away from us. Let us be who we want to be, do what we want to do, think what we want to think . . . and die and go to hell.

But God doesn't do what's easy, He does what's *loving*. For that's who God is. He is love. He doesn't just love; He is love. And as Jesus is God in the flesh, Jesus is love in the flesh. So what Jesus does is because He loves and is love.

So He doesn't walk away from the Jews. Oh, He does eventually. At the end of the Gospel today, we hear that ***Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple***. But that's only after the Jews picked up stones to stone Him! So Jesus then walked away from them. *But why?* To save himself? No. He did **because He loved them**. Because He is going to lay down His life for them, He is going to let them take his life - but not by stoning, but by being hung on the cross. For that is how He is going to save them.

So even when the Jews call Him a Samaritan and demon-possessed, Jesus patiently endures their insults. He wants them to know Him, and by knowing Him know the Father. And know the Father's love! For as Jesus told Nicodemus earlier, *God so*

loved the world that He gave his only-begotten Son. That's why He's there! The Father gave Him to us. Gave Him to death on the cross. That whoever believes in Him not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

And doesn't that sound like what Jesus told the Jews today? ***Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.*** Which sounds to the Jews like the ramblings of a madman! Everybody dies. Abraham died. Moses died. All the prophets died. That's quite a claim you're making for yourself Jesus! You're saying that you're greater than Abraham and Moses and all the prophets. Never see death, huh? Let's see how big your words are once a few of these rocks rain down on your head!

But there would be no rock throwing this day. And the nails would come soon enough. But Jesus wanted them to know who He is, for the same reason He wants you and I to know who He is, and for the whole world to know who He is - that we know that this man hanging on the cross *is our God*. Is our God, in love, laying down His life for us. Dying to abolish death. Dying that we might live.

Because that's really all that matters.

Oh, maybe you have a lot of things you're worried about for yourself right now. But one day, all those worries are going to go away, when you're staring death in the face and the only thing you can think about is: *what's going to happen to me?* Those old arguments and disagreements won't seem so important then. How big your house or bank account or car won't matter. That thing your neighbor borrowed and never returned - who cares? Who's in the White House or controls Congress can't help you then. There's just you and death . . . and we know who's going to win that battle, even though our friends and family stay with us and fight with us and encourage us, death's going to win. And if Jesus was just a friend who came to be with us like that, and die with us like that . . . uh, thanks, I guess.

But if Jesus is *more* than that . . . the one who came to rescue us from death, to defeat death with His death, one who is greater than Abraham, greater than the prophets, and, in fact, is the one they all talked about and pointed to . . . that matters. Not for his own glory and honor, but for ours.

Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.

Truly, truly. That is, amen! amen! That is, write this down and know that it is absolutely true and sure! ***If anyone keeps my word*** . . . which, as I said last week, doesn't just mean *to obey*, but to believe what He has said, and all He has done, and treasure that in your heart, ***he will never see death.*** Notice: Jesus didn't say, *he will*

never die. The Jews were right. Abraham, who believed in the coming Saviour, died. The prophets, who believed in the coming Saviour, died. Death is the wages of sin for us sinners. So like them, you and me, even though we believe, we're gonna die, unless Jesus comes back first. So when Jesus says, **he will never see death**, that's more along the lines of when we say things like: *Let's see*, or *see it through*. It means the end result, the completion. So **if anyone keeps my word**, Jesus says, the end for him will not be death, but life. And not just life, but eternal life. For Abraham, for the prophets, for you and me, and, what Jesus wants, for ALL people. Even for those who put Him on the cross.

So Jesus tells the Jews another **truly, truly** truth: **Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am**. And again notice: Jesus doesn't say, *before Abraham was, I was*. That would be grammatically correct, but theologically wrong. Jesus is telling them **He is God in the flesh**. He is the I AM, the great I AM, the unchangeable, eternal God. The God who created all things. The God who spoke to Abraham and was Isaac's substitute. The God who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. The God who led Israel through the Red Sea and the wilderness to the Promised Land. That God is now standing before them, to save them. Just as He saved in the past, so is He now.

Keep that word, believe that word, treasure that word, and live.

Jesus wants everyone to know who He is. And that's why we will confess today the Athanasian Creed. To confess that this man who died on the cross and rose from the dead is the one true God. And that in Him is life.

And so when we say to start this Creed, *Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith* - that is, the faith that is not just the truth, but the truth for all people of all time - we are really saying the same thing that Jesus said: that **anyone who keeps my word will never see death**. This word, this truth, this God, is life and the way to life. And there is no other way. This is who God is and this is what God has done and *is doing* for us. This is the faith that saved Adam and Eve, Abraham and Moses, all the prophets and martyrs, and that saves us.

We heard Peter stand up with the other eleven apostles and proclaim that on the Day of Pentecost, when, as we remembered last week, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church. And that truth has been proclaimed ever since. And that word has been giving life ever since. As it has to you. That word combined with the water of **baptism** gives you this life. That word of **forgiveness** proclaimed to you gives you this life. That word **preached** to you gives you this life. That word that makes **bread and wine** the Body and Blood of Jesus gives you this life.

Keep this word, believe this word, treasure this word.

Which means . . . when someone sins against you, there's something more important than getting revenge or holding a grudge or picking up rocks to hurl. *That's not the life you received*; forgiveness is. So forgive.

And when something in your life seems so important and begins to take over your life and make you do things you wouldn't ordinarily do - *that's not the life you received!* Let that go and cling to Jesus.

When doubts and fears get the best of you and drive you to anxiety and despair, *that's not the life you received!* Don't believe the ravings and rantings of your mind. Look to the cross. Believe the words and promises of Jesus.

And when you want to feast on the pleasures of this world and life and satisfy yourself with what you can get and do, and what the world says is right and good and will give you life . . . *that's not the life you received!* Feast instead on what truly, truly gives you this life: the Body and Blood of Jesus.

And then when you get to the end of your life, whenever that is - after many, many years, or if your life is cut short - you will have what truly, truly matters. This life, and the one who IS life. For you have kept, believed, treasured, washed in, and feasted on the word of Jesus, which is the Word of God, which is life. The life God the Father created, God the Son redeemed, and God the Holy Spirit sanctified. The life God the Father sent His Son to die for, and that God the Son sent God the Holy Spirit to give. One God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity. The Trinity we confess, and the Unity we worship, that is, receive all good from. Who gives us life.

This is what Jesus wants you to know, and all people to know. His love. Who He is and what He has done, in love, for you. Not for His own glory and honor, but for yours. To save you. He didn't walk away. He went to the cross. He didn't tell us to go to hell, He went there Himself and conquered. And when He comes again in glory, He will raise our bodies to life. **We will die, but we will not see death.** Life is our end. Life eternal.

So knowing that, *knowing that*, how are you now gonna live? The old way, the death way? Or the new way, the life way?

Blessèd be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity.

Let us give glory to him [in our lives] because he has shown his mercy to us [in His].

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.