

27 May 2007
The Feast of Pentecost

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Making a Name, or Receiving One?”

Text: John 14:23-31 (Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21)

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

Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’

Keep my word, Jesus says. Notice the singular. There are not many ‘words’ of Jesus, from which we can pick and choose, keeping some and not others. The Word of God is a singular whole, which we are to *keep* – a word which means to guard this word that has been given to us. To treasure it above all others. Some translations of the Bible mistranslate that phrase ‘keep my word’ as ‘obey my teaching.’ But while ‘keeping my word’ certainly *includes* obedience, it is much more than that.

More, for at the heart of the Word of God is the name of God, for all things start and end with Him. In the beginning, before there was anything, there was God and His name. The name of God is the Word from which all the Word of God flows. The Word which tells us who God is and all that He has done, and is still doing, for us. And so to know God is to know His name, and to know His name is to know who He is. And as we heard in the Epistle, *in His name* is life and salvation, for as Peter preached to the people in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost: *everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

And so we call upon that name, because our Lord has given us that name – not only making it *known* to us, but actually giving His name to us in Holy Baptism. There, in those waters, was our Pentecost – when the Holy Spirit was ‘poured out’ upon you and me. And we became children of God, adopted into His family, and given the family name. And so when Jesus says ‘keep my word,’ He means not only knowledge and obedience, but to keep and *treasure* this name that has been given to us! To live

in this name, and know that this is our true identity. We are not who the world says we are – we are who God says we are. His children. Dearly loved. Creatures to whom He has given His name and made His own.

But do we do this? Do we treasure the name of God that has been placed upon us, or instead – like the folks we heard about in the Old Testament reading, in Shinar – do we try to make a name for ourselves, through our own accomplishments, deeds, actions, and status? Are we dissatisfied with being God’s children, we (like the folks in the old TV shows *Cheers*) want everyone to know our name? And if so, not treasuring God’s name then leads to not keeping His Word in all the other parts of our lives, as all my thoughts, words, deeds, and desires do not what He wants, but what I want; my will, not His; my kingdom, not His; not because of His name, given to me . . . but for *mine*.

But once we start down that path – of *self*-definition and letting the world define who we are – you are inevitably led to the conclusion that you must not only make a name for yourself *before the world*, but also *before God*. Not treasuring the name of God that He has given to us means that we therefore have to get God to notice us through our good works, our achievements, our progress in the Christian life, so that He knows my name and will take me to Heaven. . . . But while you *may* be able to make a name for yourself in this world, can you do that with God? And could you ever be sure that you did enough? That you are good enough? That God knows your name? . . . And then the devil is more than eager to deepen your doubt, whispering in your ear: *you are nothing*. No, you’re *worse* than nothing – you’re a sinner. A dirty, rotten, miserable, no good, ungrateful, rebellious, sinner. You think God is gonna notice you? Oh, actually, He does, and you know what He’s gonna do to sinners like you, *don’t you . . . ?*

So what good news for us today, on this day of Pentecost! For the Holy Spirit – who Jesus says *the Father will send in my name* – comes as our Helper and Teacher. Pointing us away from ourselves and to Christ. And making His name known. That we depend on His name, not ours; and His work, not ours. For when the devil comes accusing, pointing out our sin and rebellion and the filthy name we have made for ourselves before God (which we cannot deny!) – the Holy Spirit comforts us by pointing us to Christ and His cross. To teach us that, yes, God sees what you’ve done! *That’s why He’s there*. To do something about it. Not to *accuse* you, but

to *save* you from your sin. To take it away from you, put it all upon Himself and die in our place. That all of us dirty, rotten, miserable, no good, ungrateful, rebellious, “make-a-name-for-ourselves-because-we-do-not-treasure-God’s-name” sinners be not condemned, but forgiven! And that the claim of sin, death, and the devil upon us be cancelled by Jesus’ blood.

And so when Jesus says that *the ruler of this world has no claim on me* (which He proved in His resurrection!), that word is intended for us as well! For if he has no claim on Jesus, then he also has no claim on all who bear Jesus’ name.

And so the Holy Spirit came upon the Church at Pentecost. And Peter then preaches, so that through the Word of God the Holy Spirit might come to all the people, convicting them of their sin and pointing them to Christ and His cross. And that’s exactly what happened, for as we read a little later, some 3,000 people believed and were baptized. And it wasn’t because Peter was such a gifted preacher, or such a charismatic orator, or such a great leader of men. It was the work of the Holy Spirit, through the Word, making known the name of God through the person and work of Jesus, the Christ.

And just as through Jesus God *came and made His home among us*, so through the Holy Spirit He continues to do so today. But even more, He promises that our home will be with Him. Forever. That is why it is good news for us that Jesus goes to the Father. For He goes to prepare a place for us. An eternal place, in perfection and glory.

But until that day when Jesus comes again to take us to His kingdom of glory, He leaves us with His peace. *Peace I leave with you*, He says. The peace of faith and confidence through His Word and Spirit. Knowing know that our name and who we are is not up to us, but given to us. And so we have peace, for we know that God is at home with us here, and that we will be at home with God, in eternal life. We have peace, *not as the world gives it* – a peace which comes and goes and is dependent on so many things! But true peace. Peace even in the midst of the turmoil, strife, and uncertainty of this world. The peace of God’s name upon us. That He has made us His own. And that *all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved*.

So dear Christian, *keep that word* – that name. Keep it in your hearts and minds.

Guard and treasure it like no other word on the earth. For you are His treasure!
And then you will also live it, for once the Holy Spirit kindles the fire of His love in
your heart, you won't be able not to!

But if you want to keep your own name, you may. Make it as great as you can and
take your chances in the end. But if you despair of your own name and
accomplishments . . . repent, come, and receive the body and blood of the One who
gave His life for you, forgives you, and gives His name to you. His name that is above
every name. His name by which you are saved.

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