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Pentecost 11

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“He Gave All *For You*”

Text: Matthew 13:44-52; Romans 8:28-39

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

There are two truths that we live as the church of God and the people of God on earth. The **first** is that as long as the church is in the world, God’s Word and God’s people will come under attack. That we are the Church **Militant** – a church not at peace and rest, but a church in constant battle against the enemy, who is seeking always to destroy us. And as you look around, you can see the carnage of this battle. Divisions in the church, scandals, fighting. You can see it in your own lives too – the struggle, the doubts and fears, the weakness and failures. One day you think you’re doing okay, the next you fall. Each day the attacks come, sometimes so subtle we do not even recognize them. To wear you down. To erode your foundation. The enemy is no fool. He will do whatever it takes. And as you look without, and as you look within, sometimes it can seem as if he is winning. Even the strongest of Christians can begin to wonder . . .

But there is another truth that we live as the church and people of God. The first truth is what we **see**; the second is what we **believe**. And that is that no matter what the enemy throws against us, **he cannot and will not win**. Because, as Jesus tells you today, you are His treasure, His pearl of great price. And even though you may be buried and hidden under the dirt and struggles and sin of this world and life, He sees and He knows. Even more, He has given all that He is and has for you. *That you may be His own*. He came down from Heaven and was incarnate as a man. He gave up His prerogatives as God, willingly not using His divine power. He left His throne room and the unending songs of the angels to be born in a stable. He became obedient to His parents, and lived in the creation He Himself had made. He knew hunger and thirst and sorrow. He was subjected to temptation. He knew rejection, even in His hometown, even by His own. The all-powerful One allowed Himself to be arrested and man-handled – whipped and spit on and punched. He did not fight back as His hands and feet were nailed to the cross, as His head was crowned in thorns. He experienced the complete and utter rejection of the cross, and then

tasted death and the grave. He exchanged His perfection for our sin, His place for our place, His life for our death.

Or in other words, there is *nothing* that He did not give up. He truly and fully gave up *everything* for you, His treasure. With single-minded devotion and steadfast purpose, with a heart and love we cannot completely understand, Jesus *purchased and won us from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.* (Small Catechism, explanation of the Second Article) You belong to Him.

It is important that you know that and hear that – how precious you are. Because the enemy does not want you to know and tries to convince you otherwise. And so he gets us to look at ourselves and our sin and our constant shortcomings and failures and says: *Look! You're no treasure. You're no prize. You're a sinner! And no matter how hard you try, you always will be. Why would God want you? You're of no use to Him!* Or if he cannot get us to do that, he twists the Word of God and turns these parables upside-down and says to us: *So you think you're a Christian, huh? Well look here at what Jesus says! The kingdom of heaven should be so valuable to you that you give up everything for it. But you don't, do you? And you won't, will you? Look at all the things in your life that you fear, love, and trust more than God! You ready to give it all up for Him? Think you can do that?*

And we must admit, there's a kernel of truth to all this. That's what makes the attacks of the enemy so effective. For based upon what *we* do, he's right – we are no treasures, but sinners – filled with selfishness and pride, hurting others, wanting my own way, holding others up to a standard I do not live up to. And we *should* be willing to give up everything for the kingdom of heaven. We should. But not only don't we, and won't we, we can't. The sin that lives in us keeps weighing us down and pulling us away. Even when we don't want it to! As St. Paul said a few Sundays ago: we do those things we don't want to do, and we don't do those things we do want to do. (Rom 7)

But a kernel of truth is not the whole truth! And while all this is true, there is a greater truth, which we see not when we look at ourselves, but when we look to the cross. There you see how much you are worth. There you see how much you are loved. There you see that our God is not a God who sits up in heaven, demanding that we make ourselves worthy of his love and make ourselves treasures! But a God who came to dig us out of this world of sin and death; who came to find us who

were lost in a world of falsehood, rebellion and deceit; who *came not to be served, but to serve, and to lay down His life as a ransom for many.* (Mt 20:28) To lay down His life for you.

And in the midst of the attacks and assaults of the enemy, and our struggles against sin both without and within, how we need to hear that! Yet even more, how we need our Saviour to still come to us today, with His forgiveness, with His rescue, with His power. To raise us with Himself in His resurrection and give us new life. To wash us clean again from the dirt and filth of this world. To feed us and care for us and strengthen us. To tell us that yes, He loves us still, and forgives us. *Time and time again.*

And so He does come, in Holy Baptism, Holy Supper, and Holy Gospel. In simple water, bread, wine, and words, our Saviour is coming to us and giving to us all that we need and exactly what we need, that we be and live what we are in His sight – His treasures. That we know and be confident that no matter what the enemy throws against us, **he cannot and will not win.** For he has, in fact, already been defeated through the blood and cross and resurrection of Christ, and the blood and cross and resurrection of Christ given to us here.

That confidence is also what we heard from St. Paul today, when He said: “. . . *we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*”

Paul doesn't say there that a Christian will have only good, but that all things work together for good. And notice in those verses that there is no hint of uncertainty, no wavering, no doubt. For in Christ our hope is certain and secure. In Christ, we have the promises of life, both now and forever. In Christ, world and sin and death and grave can harm us none, because these He has already overcome. “*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

And with such promises, do you see? *You are free!* Free to live – not in fear, but in

faith. Not in sin, but in service. Now, even though attacked, you can live as Christ lived; as a son of God. A treasure no longer dead and buried, but alive and glorious. A pearl no longer hidden, but reflecting the radiance of your Saviour – the radiance of His forgiveness and love. For this is who you are. A treasure worth more than anything in this world. A treasure purchased, won, and kept by your God and Saviour.

So come now and receive Him who comes for you, and go and live as the treasure you are.

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.