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Easter 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“It’s All About Jesus”

Text: John 14:1-14 (Acts 6-7; 1 Peter 2:2-10)

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

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

We celebrated the resurrection of our Lord approximately one month ago. We rejoiced in His victory over sin, death, and the devil and that His forgiveness, life, and salvation give us hope now and for the future. Easter is the high point of the Christian year.

But what has happened since our celebration? Life goes on. Troubles pop-up, return, or keep coming. We are faced with challenges and struggles at work, at school, and at home, and the great and glorious victory of our Lord’s resurrection seems to fade in the midst of these trials, troubles, and challenges, both new and old. Easter already seems so long ago, doesn’t it?

Well, Jesus knew it would be so. First, for His disciples *then*, who would soon face great trials and struggles in the aftermath of His death, and then after His ascension, when they would go out into all the world. But also for His disciples *now*. And so before His arrest, in addition to giving His church the gift of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus teaches a great deal. Words recorded for us in John’s Gospel. And so this time every year, during this part of the Easter season, the church reads from those words, that we may hear again Jesus’ preaching and be encouraged and strengthened in our lives of faith.

So what did we hear today? Jesus said:

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.

I go to prepare a place for you.

I will come again and take you to myself.

I am the way, the truth, and the life.

I am in the Father and the Father is in me.

Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and *greater* works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do.

Now, each *one* of those teachings are wonderful and could fill many sermons! But taken all together, one thing is for certain: **it's all about Jesus**. Yesterday, today, and everyday. Jesus is the cornerstone of the building, He is the capstone of the arch, He is the source of every mercy and blessing. These verses make it abundantly clear: if you have Him, you have everything.

Thomas and Philip didn't quite understand all that Jesus was saying. They ask questions. Their knowledge isn't quite right or complete. But don't mock them or think less of them for this - for who among us understands all this? Especially the mystery of the Trinity which Jesus here is teaching. But give Thomas and Philip credit for this - though they didn't fully understand, they looked to Jesus for the answers. They clung to Him tenaciously.

That's not only a good example for us, it is what a certain Mr. Harold Camping missed this weekend. I'm certain that you've heard of him. The media has paid an unusual amount of attention to him and his prediction that the end of the world was going to begin yesterday. I don't want to go into the details of all that he said. *But you know what he missed? Christ*. Not that he's not a Christian. I'm not saying that. I don't know what's in his heart. But in all his study of the Bible, he looked for numbers and clues and codes and all sorts of things . . . *but he missed Christ*. And that's what the Scriptures are all about. They're not about hidden clues, secret teachings, mysterious numbers, and being able to calculate days and times. They're all about Jesus. About his death and resurrection. That dying and rising with Jesus is the **truth**, and the **way** to eternal **life**.

That's ***the way, the truth, and the life*** that Stephen knew, and this cornerstone of Jesus' victory was so strong that not even the rocks hurled at him could move him from it. Even though death was swallowing him up, his heart was not troubled. He cried out not in fear but in faith, his final words echoing those of Jesus from the cross: ***Lord, do not hold this sin against them.***

That's the victory given also to you. That you, too, ***Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.***

There are three imperatives, or commands, in those words of Jesus. The first is a negative command - ***stop letting your heart be troubled***. Stop letting your heart be stirred up and shaken by the troubles and fears of your life and of the world. Now, that's a whole lot easier said than done! So how do you do that? That's what the second two commands teach: ***believe in God, believe also in me.***

When you look at the things of this world, the result is often that your heart is stirred up and shaken. The natural disasters that we so often see these days, the troubles that you have that no one else knows about, or even perhaps Mr.

Camping's bold prediction for this weekend. And if you tell yourself to stop worrying about these things, that doesn't work, because you're really just focusing more on what was causing you trouble in the first place!

Instead, Jesus says, **believe in God, believe also in me**. Or in other words: *look at Him*. That as we prayed earlier: *that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found*. Focus not on the troubles, but on the one whose death and resurrection is the answer and solution to your troubles. For so Stephen did. When those who didn't like his preaching were enraged, ground their teeth at him, and rushed at him, hurling rocks at him, he looked not at them, but to Jesus. He looked not at the trouble, but at His Saviour from trouble. Notice: that didn't make the trouble go away; in fact, that made it worse! But it gave Stephen peace, even in death.

And while you may not have a crowd rushing at you or rocks flying through the air at you, perhaps for you it's your job under the axe, or your character or reputation being assassinated; a disease eating away at you, financial problems clawing at you, or the slings and arrow of the evil one being hurled against you, bringing temptations so hard to resist, or pangs of conscience with regrets and accusations. It is easy, at such times, to focus on the troubles. But instead, Jesus says, focus on Him. For He is **the way, the truth, and the life**.

But now remember when Jesus said this: just mere hours before He was arrested and crucified. Which is important, for it is not just Jesus in the abstract, or the idea of Jesus, that is our peace in trouble - it is Jesus on the cross. For there we see that whatever troubles us and threatens to swallow us up, swallows Him up instead. And the empty tomb shows us that all that swallowed Him up, was itself swallowed by Him! And so it all has been conquered. He is **the way** for His cross is the way of victory. He is **the truth** because His cross reveals the truth of our sin, that the wages of sin is death, but that we have a substitute to pay those wages. And He is **the life**, for though He dies, yet He is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity.

And so Jesus' message to His disciples then, and to you today, is that though you too will die, **do not let your hearts be troubled**, for you too shall live! The resurrection didn't just raise Jesus to life again - *it also raised you* and all joined to Christ by grace through faith. And so Jesus **is going to prepare a place for you**. A place to live forever. Because you will need it. You're going to need a place to live forever, when this heavens and earth pass away. A place with Him. Not in the way that Mr. Camping thinks, or because he says so - but because your Saviour has promised. As sure as He has made you His child and royal priest in Holy Baptism, so surely He has washed you clean and forgiven you all your sins, so surely He has given you his Spirit as a guarantee, and will raise you from the dead, when He returns for you. You have His promise - the Word of God, not of man.

Until then, Jesus says, **whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these he will do, because I am going to the Father.** The “greater works” that Jesus refers to here are not greater in *kind* - as if we could possibly do anything greater than Jesus! - but greater in *scope*. Jesus had come to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, to a particular time and place, and for a short period of time. But now, He will send His apostles and those after them *into all the world*, to people of *all* times and places, to do the same Gospel works as He: to preach the good news to the poor, to forgive sins, to give the Holy Spirit, and to raise those dead in their trespasses and sins through the tools He gives to do so - His Word and Sacraments. That as for them, so for all: that **our hearts not be troubled**, but rest in the peace and confidence of Jesus.

That peace and confidence are here for you now as Jesus comes to you in His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of your sins. That you may be strengthened in your new man to carry on in your life and in the callings you have been given, that whenever Jesus returns - *even had it been yesterday* - your hearts need never be stirred up and troubled. For, as Jesus said, **you know the way to where I am going.** Yes, you know the way, for the way is not a road, but a person. And joined to Him, by faith, you are already in the Way that leads to everlasting life.

Which means that no matter what happens, we can live with an attitude like Martin Luther, who is reputed to have said: *If I knew that tomorrow was the end of the world, I would plant an apple tree today.* I don't know if he actually said or wrote that, but I think he would agree. Your Saviour has taken care of you, that whatever comes, you may go out and take care of others with hearts untroubled and minds at peace.

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.