

8 June 2011  
Vigil of Pentecost

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Our Connection to the Life and Love of God”  
Text: Exodus 19:1-9; Romans 8:12-17; John 14:8-21

When you're growing up, one of the things you're often told is that you can be anything you want to be. If you go to school, study hard, and work at it, the sky's the limit. And for the most part, I think that's true. It's not hard to find stories of people who grew up very poor and disadvantaged who, through hard work and determination, became very successful in business or politics or some other area of life. It's also why so many immigrants come to our country - for this opportunity.

But there are some things you *cannot* achieve or do for yourself no matter how hard you try. One is life. You cannot give yourself life. You had nothing to do with your birth, and when you die, you cannot undo that. Life can only be a gift from another. Another thing is the love of another person. That, too, can only be given. And then another is that you cannot make yourself part of a family. You can only be born or adopted into a family by the parents who give you their love and their name.

And this is how it is with God. You cannot earn God's life and love and you cannot make yourself a son of God. These are things that only God can give to you. And on this week of the Eve of Pentecost, that is what we celebrate - that this is exactly what God does and wants to do! He wants to give you and all people His life and love and bring us into His family. And Pentecost is the fulfillment of how He does that.

This giving of life and love is what we heard in the Old Testament reading from Exodus. The people of Israel were stuck in Egypt and would have remained stuck in their slavery there had God not come for them and rescued them. They did nothing for God - God came to them and, in a sense, *gave birth* to them as a nation that would be His own, **His treasured possession**. And that is how God wanted them to live - as His family, as the recipients of His love. They didn't earn these things, they were given. All God wanted after that was for them to remain in His love and life and family.

We also heard of this giving in the Holy Gospel. That God the Father sent His Son into the world to make Him and His love known to all people. And so Jesus *embodies* and reveals the life and love of God, which is why He tells Philip, **whoever has seen me has seen the Father**. But that's not all. Jesus then promises to

send the Holy Spirit to make known to us His love and to connect us to Him, that we may be sons of God in the Son of God. And none of this comes from what we do - it is God of His own will and love who gives all this to us. Who gives *Himself* to us! All God wants after this is for us to remain in His love and life and family.

And so the Father sent His Son to love us to death - literally. That through His death and resurrection, Jesus give us spiritual life in the forgiveness of our sins. And then the Son sends the Spirit to bring us into the family of God and make us sons of God. He is ***the Spirit of adoption***, as St. Paul says, ***by whom we cry "Abba! Father!"*** But not only that, He is the Spirit who remains with us, that we might not fall back into our old way of life, our old sins and slavery, but that we be sons of God led by the Spirit of God. And, as St. Paul then goes on to say, ***if sons, then heirs*** - inheritors of the kingdom of heaven which has been promised to us.

And so Pentecost is the fulfillment of this great work of God for us. It is a big deal. Sometimes this focus gets lost amid the mighty rushing wind and tongues of fire that happened that day. But even greater was what happened after that - the through preaching and baptism, three thousand people were adopted into God's family that day. Three thousand received God's life and love. Not because of what they did - but all because of God; because of His great love, even for sinners like you and me. Even for those who put His Son on the cross.

Which sounds too good to be true; and yet it is true. Which is good news for you and me, for how often do we fail to remain in the life and love which our Father has given to us? How often do we live as if we were not a part of His family? How often does sin get the better of us, as we live for ourselves, love our stuff, and rebel against our Father in heaven? For all that He has done for us, this is how we return His love? All parents know how that feels - the sting of ingratitude, rebellion, and rejection by their children.

Yet how great the love of God for us! Beyond measure. For He loves us with an everlasting love and does not withdraw His love from us. No. Rather through Son and Spirit, He is always calling us back in repentance and faith. Through Son and Spirit, He is always restoring us in His forgiveness and life. Through Son and Spirit, given to us in Word and Sacrament, He is loving us with His Fatherly love, that we might pray ***"Abba! Father!"***

Without His work, without His Son, without His Spirit, there is no forgiveness, no life, no love, no prayer, no salvation, no hope. But God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has given Himself for us and to us, and so all these things are ours in Him. And so we are never without hope.

And that's why Pentecost is such a big deal. Martin Luther once said: *What good*

*would Jesus' death on the cross be if no one knew about it? And to that we could add: What good would the forgiveness of sins be if we didn't know how or where to receive it? And so God has sent His Spirit for just this purpose: to make known to us all that God has done for us and to give us the gifts of God. Although Christmas and Easter get more attention, without Pentecost, they would be nothing. For the Holy Spirit brings us into the unity of God, into His family, into the fellowship of the Father and the Son.*

And so how blessed are we! That what we could not do and could never do, our God has done for us. And continues to do for us. And He will never stop. That we not live according to the flesh, but live as who we are; who He has made us - sons of God in Christ. And there is just nothing better in this world than that.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.