

20 January 2013  
Epiphany 2 / Life Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“The Life of the Groom is the Life of the Bride”  
Text: John 2:1-11 (Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

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

***His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”***

Let's cut right to the chase this morning: *that's the problem, isn't it?* We don't always do whatever our Lord tells us. Instead, how often do we do what our minds tell us, what our feelings tell us, what others in the world around us tell us. How often do we do what seems to make sense to us, what works, what's practical, what we think will give us life and make our lives easier. And when these things that we do conflict with what our Lord has told us to do, what happens? Who wins? . . . The answer's not good, is it?

*We don't do whatever our Lord tells us*, which is why we need a Sanctity of Life Sunday. Because really, all that our Lord has told us to do *is about life* - about our lives and our neighbors lives; about our physical lives and our spiritual lives. And when we do not do what our Lord has told us, those lives suffer, those lives are made less, those lives are snuffed out.

And so it was in the very beginning. After Adam plunged the world into sin, which brought *death* - by not doing whatever the Lord told him - what is the first sin we hear about after that? Murder. Cain kills his brother Abel. And life has been suffering ever since. Children, the unborn, the handicapped, the unwanted and unloved, the elderly, the chronically ill, the diseased - how often is murder now turned to as the answer? Except it's not called that, of course. It is even made to sound right, even good. And so abortion is called contraception, euthanasia is called mercy, assisted suicide is called loving, selective abortion is called not bringing an unwanted child into the world, not caring for all is called using our resources wisely. You can probably think of many more ways this evil is called good. And you can be sure that will go on.

But who, exactly, is unwanted? And what, exactly, is a life not worth living? These terms used in our world today are not words or categories you will read in Scripture. To *do whatever our Lord tells us* is to care for all life as created by God, wanted by God, loved by God, useful to God, a blessing sent from God, and worth

the life of the Son of God. To *do whatever our Lord tells us* is to regard all of that as true, even if it doesn't seem true to us. And to value all life accordingly, as sacred to our Lord, and to do and speak accordingly, even when it's hard, even when it puts us on the wrong side of the mainstream of the world, or our friends, or even our families.

For *all* that our Lord has told us is good and works good and is for good. That we don't believe that and so don't do what we ought is why we repent, as we did again this morning. Without excuse, without condition, simply acknowledging: *O almighty God, merciful Father, I am a poor miserable sinner . . .*

What if the servants at Cana had been more like us? Mary said to them, ***Do whatever he tells you***, but what if they had looked at Jesus and said: *Who are you? You can't tell us what to do! And . . . and do what? Fills these jar with water? Are you crazy? Don't you know how much they weigh? We don't want to fill and lug those things again, and nobody's going to use this water anymore anyway! The party is well underway. . . . And what's that? You want us to take some to the master of the feast? Man, you just don't get it! He doesn't have time for us and he certainly doesn't want any of this lukewarm water. This is stupid; this is foolish. Are you trying to get us in trouble or something?*

But they did what Jesus said, and the result was good; the result was joy! The wedding feast went on because of Jesus, and it didn't just go on, it got better. ***And Jesus manifested His glory*** - the glory He has come to provide for us.

And that glory Jesus *did* provide for us because - most importantly - ***do whatever he tells you*** is what **Jesus did**. The fact that Jesus *did all the Father told Him* makes all the difference in the world. For so the Son of God came down from heaven and was born for us. He submitted Himself to His parents and was then baptized for us. He led a perfect life in every way, and then when ***His hour*** did come, He offered Himself as the perfect, spotless, Lamb of God on the cross for us. *Thy will, not mine, be done*, Jesus prayed (Matt 26:39). And the result of that was that on ***His third day***, Jesus manifested His glory in His resurrection from the dead.

And so the result of the not-good-seeming-cross was good; the result was joy! The result was life - not only for Jesus, but for the life of the world. That *all* may have new life in Him. That *all* may have the promise of eternal life. That *all* may now live no longer under the life-stealing threat and dominion of sin, death, and the devil, but now in the confidence and freedom of the forgiveness of our sins. And finally, that *all* be now invited to the wedding - not just Mary, Jesus, and His disciples, but *all* now come to the wedding feast of the Lamb of God and His Bride, the Church; a feast and joy in heaven that will never end.

For *that's* the glory Jesus has come to provide for us. *That's* the glory His miracle at the wedding of Cana pointed to. That **His disciples** - that we - **believe in Him**.

For it is only believing in Him that we receive His life. All our doing **whatever he tells you** wouldn't make any difference at all for us, eternally, had Jesus not done *all the Father told Him* for us. For without the water of purification that Jesus provided for us in baptism, without His powerful Word proclaimed to us, without His wine made blood now given *us* to drink, and without the promise of forgiveness and life given us through all these means of God's grace, without all these things, *we're just marking time til death*. Those who think they're getting closer to God by their own doing apart from Jesus will only find that, in the end, they've gotten nowhere - *their life spent trying to go up the down escalator*. God may still use them to bless and benefit others, *that's true*. Our Lord can use all people for good. But the ascent to God and life is a futile one if not in Christ, if not in His forgiveness, if not in His death and resurrection. If not in the Son of God who came down to us.

And if not in the Spirit whom the Son of God sent down to us. The same Spirit that descended upon Jesus in His baptism, is now the Spirit that the crucified and resurrected Jesus sends down to us in our baptism. That we in faith confess **Jesus is Lord**. That we be joined to Jesus in His death and resurrection and live a new life. That we not **be led astray to mute idols**, as Paul said, but find *in Jesus* our only source of life and hope.

For there are a awfully lot of *mute idols* in our world today, drawing people to find their life and hope in them. And especially on this Sanctity of Life Sunday we recognize how powerful is the *mute idol of death*. Which is so sadly ironic, that more and more people look for life and hope *in death*. What a grand deception and illusion this monstrous *mute idol* is! This slavery which masks itself as freedom; this evil which masks itself as good.

Which makes the Word of Truth more important than ever. "*This is the Word of the Lord*" needs to sound forth clearly from the Church, that as Isaiah said, **the nations see the righteousness of God**. They may not like it - they didn't like it when the prophets like Isaiah proclaimed it to them either - but this is the Word the world needs.

But - be clear about what this means! (This is important. Make sure you're paying attention here! Don't zone out now.) The nations, *all* nations, need to see the righteousness of God first and foremost not because it tells us what to do and because we then do such righteous things. No! That would be the righteousness of God that drove Luther to despair; that demands from us a righteousness we could never do, a righteousness we could never achieve, a righteousness we could never fulfill. No, first and foremost, the nations, all nations, need to see the righteousness

of God **in the person of Jesus Christ** - the good news of what our God, our Lord of life, **has done for us**. He is the righteousness of God that gives life and joy and hope to a world and to people lost in confusion and despair.

And again, especially on this Sanctity of Life Sunday, this is the Word that needs to be proclaimed. Yes, the Law must do its work and lead to repentance. But there are so many - *so many* - caught in guilt and fear and condemnation. Thinking their sin too great. Even Christians. Yes, maybe even some of you, or some who may listen to this sermon later on the internet.

And so especially on this Sanctity of Life Sunday it must be proclaimed loudly and clearly that - as Isaiah put it - that ***as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you***. *So shall God rejoice over you!* Yes you, whoever "you" are and whatever "you" have done. Jesus traded His life for yours. He died that you be forgiven, that you may live. Yes, for those who have had abortions, or even more than one. For those who have murdered in their hearts, in their words, or even in cold blood. For those who thought they were being merciful in ending the life of one suffering. For those who have inflicted suffering on others. For those who dealt in death and even encouraged others to do so. For those who care for no one but themselves, those who are so caught up in the depravity of sexual sins, those who have neglected or abandoned children or parents or others in need, those who have trafficked in human lives, those whose lives are filled with nothing but anger, hatred, and bitterness. Whoever you are and whatever you have done, there is forgiveness and life here for you. And know that the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and all the angels of God rejoice over each and every sinner who repents. Over you.

And so today, *do whatever he tells you* means first and foremost, to come and receive His forgiveness. For this He has told you to do! To come and be baptized. To come and hear His *I forgive you all your sins* in response to your confession. To come and receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, *given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins*. To come and receive His gifts, for that is the highest worship of God. For what God wants most is not for you to give to Him, but for you to receive from Him what He wants to give to you. The life He wants to give you in His Son.

And then receiving these gifts, we live the life that has been given to us. We live the life of the Spirit given to us, the Spirit, who as Paul said, is working in and leading each of us as He wills. To build up the Body of Christ. To be His blessing to others. Which is why all of you are here today. It is no accident that you are. You are here in this place, at this time, to be this Body of Christ we call Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church, to be our Lord's blessing to each other and to the world.

*So do whatever he tells you! Come and receive His gifts. Go and live His life. For (to paraphrase John just a bit) . . . On the third day, there will be a wedding in heaven. Jesus will be there, and His mother. So will the disciples. But the wine will not run out and there will be no water for purification. For it is the wedding feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end. And you, dear Christians, are the Bride. You are the guests of honor! For you all has been prepared and is ready. For yes, as at Cana, the best is yet to come. To live in the glory of the Lord forever.*

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.