

4 August 2013
Pentecost 11

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Revealing Word”

Text: Luke 12:13-21; Colossians 3:1-11;
Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-26

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

Children like playing hide and seek. At least, for a while. *If* you don't hide too well. But if you hide in a really good spot, in a place they don't know about and so wouldn't think to look, they don't know what to do. And instead of being fun, the game becomes frustrating. So at that point, the hider will often begin to call out: *I'm over here! Look over here.* And they keep calling out until, following the voice, the child finds them.

St. Paul said today: ***For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*** “For you have died” is baptismal language. In Holy Baptism you were united to Christ Jesus in His death and resurrection. Your old, sinful self is put to death and a new Christian is raised and given life. In baptism your sins are forgiven. In baptism you are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. In baptism you are given a life that not even death will be able to end. A life that is everlasting. That is the wonderful gift, the wonderful inheritance, Christ has for you and has given to you.

But as long as you live here in this world, on this side of eternity, that ***life is hidden with Christ in God.*** You cannot see this wonderful life. What you see are earthly things. We see poverty and struggle and homelessness, wars and terrorism and hate. We see fights and hurts and division. We see sickness, disease, and death. And seeing all this - and especially when it happens to you - it may seem as if your life is very far away or slipping away, and that your heavenly Father has forgotten about you or stopped caring about you.

What happens then is that we may begin to look for our life in the wrong places. Like a child in a game of hide and seek, we children of God begin to look in those places we know about, those places we see and where life seems to be. For some it is money, for some it is sexuality, for some it is power or popularity, or their work and career. *What is it for you?* What is it that in your mind you think: if I only had that, if I only got there, if I only achieved this, *then* I'd have it made. Then I'd be happy. Then I'd have life. Is it marrying the person of your dreams? Winning the lottery? Getting that job? What is it for you?

Solomon found out that none of those places are the right places. He had all that. King of Israel, the wisest man on earth and the wealthiest, and not just one woman of his dreams, but around a thousand! And he was miserable. It's all vanity, he said. It's all meaningless. It's all like trying to capture the wind and put it in a box - an always striving but never attaining. And then you die and you got nothin'. And so Solomon was frustrated. He was a child playing hide and seek for his life and he couldn't find it.

The man in the parable Jesus told had the same problem, though he thought he had found his life. It was like he won the lottery - he had such a good harvest that he was set for many years to come. He was going to **relax, eat, drink, and be merry**. Now, just being rich isn't wrong - but here was his fatal mistake: it seems that he equated worldly wealth with spiritual wealth. He thought that if all was well physically, then all was also well spiritually. For he not only pats himself on the back for his good fortune, he also speaks *to his soul*. All is well, he says. Soul, we have it made. This is a sign that God is well-pleased with me, soul. But to put it in "hide and seek terms," that is like seeing a pair of shoes behind a curtain and thinking you have found the person, only to pull the curtain back . . . and see nothing but shoes.

It's easy for us to make that mistake as well. To think that if I have what I want, if I have a good and easy life, then God must be pleased with me. But if I don't have what I want, if life is not so good and pretty tough, then God must be angry at me. To that kind of thinking, however, Jesus says: **Fool!** And that's a much stronger word in the Bible than how we use it today. It means to live without reason. It means to live without faith, not in the image of God. It is to live like an animal who only thinks of where the next meal is coming from and that's all that really matters.

For, Jesus says, ***one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions***. Or in other words: one's life is not *hidden* in possessions, or anything else in this world for that matter. You cannot find it there. You're looking in the wrong place.

You may have heard about a man named Sam Simon recently. He is the co-creator of the Simpsons and has been in the news lately because he decided to give his fortune away to charity because he has terminal colon cancer and the doctors have given him only a short time to live. Now, I don't know his motivation, but there is a danger here as well - to try to find life in giving what you have away. What he's doing isn't bad, maybe actually good. But if he's looking for life, or looking to make his life meaningful in this way, or think that he will be right with God by doing this, he's just as wrong as Solomon and the rich man. There's no life here either.

And really . . . why wait? The truth is that we're all diseased with that terminal

illness called sin. If God has made you wealthy, do you think it's so you can sit there being rich in your richness while others go around in need of even the most basic food and clothing and shelter? Or has God made you rich to be His blessing to others? That He may provide for them through you? That you can be a giver, being like your heavenly Father, and living in His image? Wealth isn't wrong, but what we do with it may be. When it - *or its pursuit* - becomes an idol and where we think our life is to be found, instead of being **rich toward God** by being rich toward our neighbor.

So repent of that. Of *all* that. Put away all the old ways, as Paul said. Just as you died in your baptism so die again in repentance and hear where your life is found. For just as that frustrated child losing at hide and seek needs to hear the voice of the hider to know where to look, so we sinners who are losing at life because we're dying need to hear the voice of our Saviour to know where our life is. Our Saviour who calls out to us by His Word, by the Gospel, and says *Here I am!* Here is my life, my forgiveness, my Spirit, for you.

For the Son of God, you see, didn't come to divide our worldly inheritances and make sure we all get our fair share here on earth, *but to give you His whole inheritance!* To give you a throne in heaven and a life and a kingdom that will never end. And so He came, hidden in human flesh, hidden as a sinner on a cross, not to fight for His life but to lay down His life, that dying with you, you may rise with Him and live with Him. To call out to you and to all where your life is . . . and to give you that life.

And so Jesus calls out in baptism to die and rise with Him to a new life. And Jesus calls out to receive His forgiveness that overcomes sin and death and gives life. And Jesus calls out to eat His Body and drink His Blood - the food that feeds you not only for this life, but for a life that never ends. You can't see Him in these things that look so plain and ordinary, for He's hidden. But His voice is calling out: *Here I am! Here is my life, my forgiveness, my Spirit, for you. Here is where I can be found.* In these things that are not out of the reach of anyone, but are here and available for all.

So **set your mind on things above.** That's how Paul put it. The hidden things from above that have been put here in these visible things for you. And find life. Your life hidden with Christ in God. And live that life in whatever form it may take. For while the outward appearance of your life changes, your life in Christ remains the same. For He is the same. Always the same - yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8). And so do not judge by what you can see, like the rich man, and do not judge by what you feel or think, like Solomon - but believe. Believe the Words and promises of Jesus. Believe the one who is now hidden, but calls out to you where He is. And when He appears, on the last day, then your life will appear also. The life you had

all along but was hidden, will appear for all to see.

So if God seems to be hiding from you, for things just don't seem to be going so good . . . or if God is absent from your life because things are going too well . . . or if you're somewhere in between, you've come to the right place. For this is the place for sinners. This is the place for those in need of life. This is the place where our Lord comes and speaks and gives. To give you the treasure of heaven.

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.