

26 May 2024  
The Festival of the Holy Trinity

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Because He Has Shown His Mercy to Us”  
Text: Isaiah 6:1-8; John 3:1-17; Acts 2:14a, 22-36

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

There are four words you never want to hear. Whether you're at work or at school; whether you're trying out for a sport or to play in an orchestra; whether you're applying for a job or to get into a college; whether it's about a relationship you're in or want to be in; or whether it's about a whole host of other things in your life . . . there are four words you never want to hear. Four words that cause a lot of heartache: *you're not good enough*.

No one likes hearing that, but that thought is all over the readings we heard today.

First there was the prophet Isaiah. **He was not good enough** to stand in the presence of the Lord. So when he is given this awesome and glorious vision of God and of heaven he cries out: *Woe is me!* I am lost. I am a dead man. I am not good enough to see and stand before the Lord of hosts. And he was right.

Then we heard from the sermon that the apostle Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. And what he said was that there was one man who was good enough - but what did you do to Him? *You crucified Him!* And in the next verses, which were not included in the reading for today, the people realize **they're not good enough**. His preaching cut them to the heart and exposed them.

And then in the Holy Gospel, we heard the story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night to talk with Him. And after beginning a nice, polite, conversation with Jesus, Jesus tells him, basically, that **he's not good enough**. Nicodemus wasn't used to hearing that. He was a Pharisee, and the Pharisees were the good ones . . . or so everyone thought. But nope! Jesus tells him right off the bat, that he's missing something; that something else is needed: *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

And so it is. For Isaiah, for those Jews in Jerusalem, for Nicodemus, *and for you and me*. Yup, **we're not good enough** either.

Now, we confess that every week. You did today, though maybe you didn't realize it. But

when we confess our sins at the beginning of the service each week, it isn't just this sin or that sin you are confessing; that you just messed up *a little* this week. No, you are really confessing **I am not good enough**. In the eyes of the world, oh, maybe you are worthy of honor. You excel at a sport. You got into that school you really wanted to go to. You're a talented musician. You've worked really hard and achieved. And that's great!

But here the standard is different. Before God, the standard is *perfection*. Fear, love, and trust in God above *all* things. Love your neighbor as yourself. Don't give in to lust. Don't fight with your brother. Don't disrespect your parents. Don't gossip. Don't lie. Don't put yourself on that pedestal called pride and think you're something special. Don't keep wanting to be served and not serve others. And more.

Now, have you done some good things this week? I'm sure you have. *But perfect?* Even when you try really hard, all that other stuff still happens, doesn't it? I know it does for me. I'm no better than Isaiah, than Nicodemus. *You?* It's true, isn't it? *We're not good enough.*

And yet . . . and yet God wants you here, with Him. Not good enough as you may be. He called Isaiah and *wanted* to reveal Himself to him. He sent Peter and the apostles because He *wanted* those Jews who yelled "crucify!" and put Him on the cross to repent and be with Him. He came in the flesh because He *wanted* folks like Nicodemus and He wanted to lay down His life for him. And God wants you here with Him. Not because you're worthy, but to make you worthy. Not because you're good, but to make you good. Not because you're without sin, but to forgive you. For as Jesus told Nicodemus, **God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that** [an unworthy, not good enough] **world might be saved through him.**

And that's what this day, the Festival of the Holy Trinity, is all about. Today we remember and celebrate not just who God is **in Himself** - that He is the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God in three persons and three persons in one God, and all the other stuff we will confess in the Athanasian Creed today . . . today we remember and celebrate who He is **FOR US**. That the Father sent His Son into the world to save the world. That the Son sent His Spirit to give us the forgiveness He won for us on the cross through the Word and Sacraments. That the Spirit leads us to see our Saviour on the cross and to believe in Him there. And that the Son - through His death and resurrection - takes us to the Father. The triune God, all three persons active, all three persons working for you and for your salvation and the salvation of *the world*. That's why the Athanasian Creed *says this is the catholic faith* - not the Roman faith; but catholic with a little "c," meaning universal. Because this faith is true for all people, universally. God wants to save all of us *not good enoughs*.

So it was for *not good enough* Isaiah. After his "**Woe is me!**" God began His work, having an angel take a coal from a sacrifice and touch Isaiah's lips. And with that, Isaiah is changed. His guilt is taken away, his sin atoned for, and he goes from a cowering pool of

woe to *"Here am I! Send me."*

So it was for the *not good enough* people who heard Peter's Pentecost sermon. God went to work. After being cut to the heart and asking *what shall we do?* they are touched with the water of Holy Baptism. And some 3,000 folks receive the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So it was for *not good enough* Nicodemus. Jesus went to work. We don't hear the end of his story today, but we do hear of him again later. He is one of the two men brave enough to care for Jesus 'body after His death on the cross (John 19:38-39). Not one of the twelve do that - only a man named Joseph and Nicodemus. He seems to have been changed by his encounter with Jesus, going from a fearful, nighttime meeting with Jesus to a brave and bold daylight taking of the body of this criminal from the cross.

And so it is for *not good enough* you and me. God went to work. You have been born again, born from above, by water and the Spirit. The sacrifice from the altar of the cross now touches your lips in Holy Communion. The Word of God has not only cut you to the heart but also proclaimed to you for forgiveness of your sins. And by grace through faith, by these gifts of God, your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for. **God went to work, so that your not good enough is not good enough no more.**

For Holy Trinity Sunday is about the one - the *only* one - who is good. Who created this world good, and then came to restore its goodness after we, in sin, make it not good. Holy Trinity Sunday is not about our God who stands afar off, watching and judging and demanding, but who came, personally, to be involved in your life, to change and restore you. And when the uncreated, infinite, holy, glorious, eternal, almighty, everlasting God takes your sin upon Himself, dies in your place, pays the wages of sin, rises victorious from the dead, and then touches you with that forgiveness and life, you are changed, you are restored. For touched by Him and joined to Him and His work for you, you go from *not good enough* to child of God!

And that is what you now are. You, me, Isaiah, Nicodemus, Peter and the twelve, and the 3,000 that day - not because of what you've done, but because of what Jesus did *for you*. That's what matters. That's what counts.

But from the good Jesus did for you now comes the good that you do, for the Spirit who lives in you is not idle but active, to do good not only *in* you but *through* you, in the vocations, the callings, God has given you to live in. For Isaiah, that meant being a prophet. For Peter, it meant being an apostle and preaching. For Nicodemus, it meant teaching and caring and serving. For me, it means being your pastor and all that goes with that. And for you, it means living in the vocations, the callings God has given you, and giving the goodness God has given and worked in you to those around you - in your family, at work, at

school, in your neighborhood, your country. That is the good you do. Helping, serving, protecting, mercying, loving, forgiving. Not in order to *be good enough* for God - you will never be that; you will never *not* need Jesus 'forgiveness. No, you do good because that's who you now are. A new person, a new creation, born again, born from above. A child of your heavenly Father, through your brother Jesus, and alive in the Holy Spirit. We'll confess that in a moment, too. Not just who God is and what He has done, but also the good He now works in us and through us for others. That this, too, is an important part of the Christian life. That Christianity is not just a "get out of jail free" card! But that being a child of God means you get to live a new life. Not the same old life! A new life. A Christ life.

And then we'll gather around our Lord's Table here, we who are not good enough on our own, we'll gather as imperfect children, to receive the good One, to receive His Body and Blood, to receive His good and perfect gifts, His forgiveness, life, and salvation. And to receive them together. To receive them as a family of faith.

And you know who else is here with us? Lots of people, actually! Isaiah, Nicodemus, Peter, and all who have died in the faith, those who are now part of, as we hear in the liturgy, *the angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven*. We are one in Christ. They in the Church Triumphant and we in the Church Militant. Yet one in Christ. Until the day when this now invisible fellowship and oneness is made visible once and for all, when our Lord comes again and the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth, are complete. And all our not good enough - *all of it!* - goes away forever.

And *that*, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is what our God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - has come to do for you. That's what He's all about. Making you new. No matter *who* you are, no matter *where* you are, no matter what you have done. Making you new to live a new life. Truly, that is what this day is all about. The life and love of the Father, the life and love of the Son, and the life and love of the Holy Spirit, **for you**.

And so we sang in the Introit earlier, *Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give glory to Him because He has shown His mercy to us* (Introit Antiphon).

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.