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Pentecost 7

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Who’s the Offensive One?”

Text: Mark 6:1-13; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

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

It was *supposed* to be a day, it *should* have been a day, that left everyone feeling good. Hugs and kisses from family. Handshakes and pats on the back from friends and former co-workers. Even admiration from those who perhaps hadn’t known Him so well before, but had now heard of all that He had been doing. He was a well-respected teacher. He was doing mighty works, just having healed a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years and raising Jairus’ little girl from the dead. Word had gotten around, and they were proud – one of their own, doing great things. And so on that Sabbath the synagogue was perhaps unusually crowded. The whole town coming out, to see Jesus and listen to Him preach.

But Jesus didn’t say what they expected Him to say. They were *astonished*, and not in a good way, at what He said. For they began to say to one another, *Who does this guy think He is? Where did He get these things? Why is He speaking like this?* And so the day that began with such anticipation and promise, ended with the people mad, disappointed, and *offended*.

So what did Jesus say? What did He say that was so offensive? We’re not told here, in the reading we heard today, but Mark tells us earlier what Jesus’ message was as He went about preaching. He said: ***The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.*** Repent, because they are sinners. They’ve done what is wrong and not done what is good and right. They’ve spoken hurtfully, and their thoughts and desires have been soiled with sin. So repent, and believe that the One spoken of by the prophets of the Old Testament, the One who would do the works of God like He was doing, the One who would save them from those sins, is here. And not just “here” in some general sense, but here - sitting before them and speaking to them now. The kingdom of God is at hand for the King is at hand. *Repent of yourselves and believe in Me*, Jesus said.

And they were offended.

Now, were they offended at who Jesus claimed to be? That this man they knew as ***the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon*** claimed to be something more? Maybe. But they could have dismissed that and dismissed Him as a lunatic. But at

least He would be *their* lunatic, especially if He did some of those mighty works *for them*. But I think what really stuck in their craw, what really offended them about Jesus, was not what He claimed about Himself, **but what He claimed about them**. Calling them sinners. Calling them to repentance. How 'bout a little slack, Jesus! He could have talked about Himself all He wanted, but once He started talking about *them*, and accusing *them* - that's offensive; that's crossing the line!

And that's generally the way it is today, too, isn't it? Jesus, and the church, and religion are all okay with most folks. They may think we're goofy, even crazy. And we can have a church and we can meet all we want and people won't much care. In fact, they may even *like* some of the things the church does for the community in feeding and clothing the poor and other service projects. And some folks may even come and join a church like that. *As long as we leave their lives alone*. As long as we don't cross the line. As long as we don't speak against what they believe or like or think or do, and the latest thing the culture says is good and right and normal. But do that . . . and people get offended. Things start to get a little nasty . . .

But it's not just "them," is it? *It's you too*. And if Jesus were here today, He'd offend you too. 'Cause He wouldn't let you get away with your sins. He wouldn't let you hear the Word of God here, and receive His Body and Blood here, and then leave like nothing ever happened. He'd confront you about why your Bible isn't cracked all week, or if you did crack it, why you can't remember what you read 5 minutes later. He'd confront you about why you're too ashamed to speak about Him to your friends and neighbors. He'd ask why you haven't lifted a finger to reach out to those folks who haven't been in church for a while. Or why you do the least, not the most, you can do. He'd challenge you for the grudges you hold and your lack of forgiveness. He'd confront you with how uncaring and hurtful your words and actions are, especially to your family members. He'd ask why you continue to do what you know is wrong and then act like it doesn't even matter. He'd ask why you continue to be more concerned about your own name and reputation than His. *And that's just for starters*. Then He'd get specific . . . and name all your false gods . . . and mine! All those things you fear, love, and trust more than Him. All those things in your life you put before Him. And maybe we'd be thinking, or maybe you are even now thinking: *How 'bout a little slack, Jesus!* After all, we're the ones here in church! We're the ones here to hear you! Why are you speaking to us like everyone else? We're your homies!

Well, maybe we're not as different as we think we are. Or should be. We know better, and so should be held to a higher standard. And if we take offense at this, even just a little, the truth is, Jesus isn't the offensive one, **we are**. And we don't like the one who points it out, who exposes us. The one who says, *The Emperor has no clothes*, though I've tried to dress myself up and make myself look like a good Christian. And I know, it's not Jesus who crossed the line, it's me. I'm the one who crossed from holiness to sin, from life to death, from heaven to hell.

But this is exactly what makes Jesus so amazing. Every other religion or belief in this world will deny the line, move the line, or demand that you cross back over that line that you crossed yourself. **But Jesus is the only God to cross that line to carry us back Himself.**

Think of the worst, foulest smelling place you can imagine on this earth . . . a garbage dump, a septic tank, when the sewer backed up into your basement. Got it? What Jesus did in coming to us in the stench of our sin is infinitely greater than that . . . when God became man. But cross over He did. To take all your offense, all your stench, all your sin, all your death, all your hell, upon Himself. 'Cause when He did that, He took you upon Himself, that in His dying and rising, you might too. You were going to die anyway, but you had no chance for life. Zero. Nada. Nil. Zilch. Bupkus. So Jesus came to take you back to life. To take you back from sin and death to life. A new life, in Him, in His cross, in His forgiveness.

And so He washes you clean and robes you with His righteousness. We call it baptism. And then He continues to wash the grime of your daily life of sin off your feet. We call that absolution. And then He feeds you with the bread of life. We call that His Body and Blood, His Supper, His communion. It's all a foretaste of the other side of the line, which we had before satan convinced us that the grass is greener on the other side, but it wasn't a green pasture at all, but a cesspool.

So as Jesus said: *repent*. Stop denying the line, moving the line, or trying to cross back over that line yourself. You can't. Only Jesus can. So repent in your weakness and be strong in Him. That's what St. Paul said: ***For when I am weak, then I am strong.*** Now we don't like being weak, that's why we don't like telling those we've hurt or offended we're sorry and ask for forgiveness. *But you are never so strong than when you do;* than when you give up on yourself and your pride and your strength, and rely on Jesus.

So maybe that's how we should think of repentance - not just admitting that I've done something wrong, but that I've been relying on the wrong person and the wrong things. I've been relying on myself and what I want and what pleases me and what I think and what I want to do rather than Jesus and His Word. But am I reliable? Who can't keep a New Year's resolution or even a Lenten discipline for 40 days? Who keeps falling back into the same old sins? Would it not be better to instead rely on the one who heals women bleeding for twelve years, raises little girls from the dead, and says *I forgive you all your sins?*

You see, that's what Jesus wanted for the folks in His hometown. And that's why He then sent ***His disciples out two by two and proclaim that people should repent.*** And by ***casting out demons and healing many who were sick,*** show them that there was someone better than themselves to rely on. And that one is here! He has crossed the line

and come to us. The Kingdom of God is at hand.

And it still is. For even greater than healing the sick and casting out demons, Jesus rose from the dead. And risen from the dead, promised to still be here with us, now in His Word and Sacraments. But no less powerful. He is still speaking and forgiving and giving new life, even life from the dead. And no matter how good or strong or disciplined you are, you can't do that. So who are you going to rely on? Yourself, or the one who is risen from the dead and promised you the same? Seems like an easy choice to me. And makes repentance a little less offensive, and a lot easier to swallow.

So while our country celebrated Independence Day a few days ago, remembering what happened almost 250 years ago now, *our* Independence Day happened some 2,000 year ago, when Jesus rose from the dead. And while we keep trying to build a more perfect union, it never will be, perfect. Only one is. The union of God and man in Jesus. The unity we had, gave up, but now have again in Jesus. And so baptized into Him, we sing not a *national* anthem, but a *heavenly* one. *Holy, holy, holy*, we sing with the angels. For the holy one is here with us. The King is here with us. So we repent and He gives. His forgiveness for our sin. His life for our death. So that we, too, can have a homecoming - when we go home. Or better to say, when Jesus takes us home, to be with Him, forever.

Or, to use the words we sang in the Introit today:

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!

Blessèd is the man who repents - that is, who takes refuge in him!

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.