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Pentecost 6

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Water is Thicker than Blood!”

Text: Matthew 10:34-42; Romans 6:1b-11

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

Last Sunday we heard Jesus speak of the opposition we will face as Christians in this life, walking against the crowd and the ways of this world. Today, Jesus intensifies that teaching by revealing to us that the opposition we face doesn't just come from strangers or even friends and acquaintances, but may even come from our own family! Children and parents, divided against one another. For the truth will divide. Or, in our efforts to maintain peace and unity, the truth will be given up.

And this is happening. I heard in the news this week about a celebrity couple that is getting married, and so she is becoming a scientologist – not because she thinks it is the truth – but because that's what her soon-to-be husband is. And so in the name of “love” the truth is sacrificed. . . . I've known many grown children who no longer believe what the church they attend teaches, but they will not leave that church and join another one. Why? They're worried about what their mother would think, and that she would not approve. And so in the name of “family” the truth is sacrificed. . . . Or (not just to pick on other people!) what about the Lutheran pastor who, instead of remaining steadfast in our church's teaching of communing only those who are agreed with us in the doctrine and teaching of this church, decides to commune his mother – even though she belongs to a church which does not believe the same as we do – in order to keep peace in the family! And so in the name of “peace” the truth is sacrificed.

Now, I don't want to give the impressions that families are not important. They are. They are gifts from God, one of the most important relationships we have is as a family, and we should treat them with care and respect and do everything we can to preserve them! God Himself knows this, with father and mothers, husbands and wives, marriages and families protected by no less than three of the Ten Commandments! (The fourth, sixth, and tenth, in case you're wondering!) . . . But if our family gets in the way of our relationship with God; if family and bonds of human love actually separate us from the truth of God and His Word, then this gift of God has been turned into something it was never meant to be – namely, an idol: something that we love more than the God who gave these people and relationships to us in the first place.

But this is not just our struggle – think through the Scriptures at the many struggles between family and truth, between “love” and faithfulness. Was Adam more concerned about what Eve would say to him that night if he didn’t eat the fruit, than he was with God? What if Abraham had been more worried about Sarah’s reaction when God told him to sacrifice Isaac? What about all the things David did in the name of his “love” for Bathsheba? Solomon did put his many wives before his faith, and lost his faith, falling into despair. What if Mary put her engagement to Joseph before God and His Word? Or if James and John had put the Zebedee family fishing business first, instead of following Jesus? And I could go on and on. . . . But as you can see, it’s not just us. It’s not just our generation that has this struggle between faith toward God and love for each other; between family and truth; between what ties us to each other and what ties us to God. It’s as old as life itself.

And so even though Jesus’ words in the Holy Gospel this morning *sound* shocking, they’re really not. Hard, yes! But He speaks the truth – the truth of the First Commandment: *You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things . . . or people.* And so to put family first is idolatry.

But in the second half of that reading – after those words about our family relationships – Jesus starts talking about another kind of relationship we have as Christians. The relationship between the apostles and those to whom they are sent in the Name of Christ. Between the prophets and those who received them – not because of who they were, but because they spoke the Word of God. And between little ones who believe, and those who care for them in the Name of Jesus. Jesus is saying here that for those who lose their families because of Him and the truth of God’s Word, there is a reward; another family to take their place – the family of God.

And this too is a theme present throughout the Scriptures. In the Old Testament the people of God are frequently called by the family name: *the children of Israel*. Jesus, when told that His family wanted to see Him, replied: ***‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking about those who sat around Him, He said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!’ Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.*** (Mk 3:32-35) Paul considered himself the “father” of those who believed in Corinth, calling them his dear children. And then there is the truth we hear in the book of Romans, that: ***all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*** (Romans 8:14-15)

All of which is to say: there is a new family to which we belong. A new family that transcends the bounds of time and space. A new family that will not last just for a time, but for eternity. A new family that we receive when we are born again into the family of God.

The world will tell you that **blood is thicker than water** – that our family relationships create a kind of bond that cannot be broken by the things of this world that, by comparison, are like water. But Jesus today flips that saying on its head! For in our new family, our new life, it is **water that is thicker than blood!** For this new family, this new life, we are given in the waters of Holy Baptism. And that water, combined with the Word of God, creates a bond that is greater than any other on earth. For it is the bond that we have not just with each other – but the bond that we have with each other *by virtue of our being united in Christ!*

And this is what Paul was speaking of in the Epistle from Romans chapter six: the new life that we have received in Holy Baptism. The new life that is not like the old life. The new life that changes us, that has set us free from our slavery to sin and idolatry, and that gives us a new family. A new family of all who have been joined in the death and resurrection of Jesus. A new family united by faith. A new family that death cannot separate. A new family, bonded by the Spirit and forgiveness.

There is a saying parents sometimes use, that when two people get married: *we're not losing a son; we're gaining a daughter!* Well by faith, that is what happens here. In Christ, we're not losing our earthly families, as much as we're gaining a new family! And so we have a not just an earthly Father, but now a heavenly Father and also many earthly fathers and mothers, and grandparents, and brothers and sisters, and children and grandchildren! Time may take away our earthly families, and space may separate us from close friends and relationships – but look at how richly God has rewarded those who abide in the truth of His Word! With a family that does not compete against Him for love and loyalty, but which is created by those very things! With a family that does not depend on us to keep it together, but one which He keeps together. For that which God brings together, He will keep together. Together in Him. United through Baptism, bound together by the Word, strengthened in forgiveness, and fed by the body and blood of the very Son of God! The Son of God in whom we are all sons of God.

And so as we today dedicate this new baptismal font, it is with all of that in mind: that this water is central to who we are, here in this place. That this water has made us who we are, as our old, sinful self is crucified with Christ, and a new man raised to live a new life. That this water, by virtue of the command and Word of God that is in it, has given us the forgiveness of all our sins: past, present, and future, and has therefore set us free. That this water gives us a hope and future that nothing on this earth can take away. That this water unites us as a new family in Christ. For this water is for young and old, rich and poor, male and female; no matter who you are, what you have done, or how great a sinner – here is **water that is thicker than blood.**

And so we place this font in our church front and center – for indeed it is! If you stand in

the back of the church, you can't look at the altar and the cross without looking also at it. If you walk to this altar you must go by it. And as you do, remember. This water is why you are here. It is ***a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit.*** (Titus 3) It gives you a new family, a new Father, and it is what gives you access to this altar and Table, to pray the family prayer and to eat the family meal. It is Holy Baptism. A gift given to you once, probably when you were very little, and which you probably don't even remember! But truly the gift that keeps on giving. The gift that affects you each and every day of your life. The gift that means that no matter what happens in this world, no matter the divisions and struggles, no matter the sin and death – nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. He has claimed you as His own, and you are His. Born again into His family, the royal family, with all the rights and privileges that come with such status. So while there may be a whole bunch of people going on TV now, saying: "I want to be a Hilton!" . . . ***how great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are.*** (1 John 3:1) Not because we're in a contest. Not because we have to earn it. Not because we have to outdo the others! But because it's His gift. To you. For you are baptized! Baptized in the water that's thicker than blood!

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.