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Pentecost 15

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Not *Enactment*, but *Enfleshment!*”

Text: Mark 7:1-8, 13-14, 21-23

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

Dear fellow . . . *hypocrites*.

You probably thought I was going to say “Dear fellow redeemed,” or “dear fellow saints,” or something along those lines. Not today. Today we need to come to the realization that when Jesus criticizes hypocritical behaviour (as we heard in the Holy Gospel), we don’t have to look far to see who He’s talking about! It’s not just about Pharisees – it’s about you and me.

For think about it: the Pharisees criticized Jesus’ disciples for eating with ceremonially unclean hands. **But what about me**, when I criticize all those people who don’t come to church, but forget about all those times when I’m here physically but my mind is absent; a thousand miles away, thinking about all kinds of things. Even when I come to church, do I come to church?

The Pharisees acted holy but failed to see the sin within. **But what about me**, when I confess my sins at the beginning of the service, but also thank God that I’m not as big a sinner as *that* guy! Or when I ask forgiveness for all my many sins, but refuse to forgive the one my neighbor did to me.

The Pharisees wanted people to think a certain way about them, and maintain a certain status. **But what about me**, when I live and act one way here around my fellow Christians, but another way at home. Humble here, but proud at home. Sinner here, but holier than thou at work. Or when I’m glad my Christian friends know I’m a Christian, and when my unchristian friends think I’m just like them. When it’s not only true about Las Vegas that “*What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas,*” but also when “*What happens in Church, stays in Church!*”

It’s me . . . it’s you, isn’t it? The dictionary definition of a hypocrite is one who plays a part; or who wears a mask. And we all do that. But I think there’s more to it than that.

That there's another way to think of what a hypocrite is, and to reveal the hypocrite in each of us. *And it's this*: it's when we think **how much better a world this would be, if only everybody were just like me!**

*Well I got news for you*: everybody is just like you, and that's *why* the world is the way it is! ***“For from within, out of the heart of man, – [Jesus said; out of your heart; and my heart!] – come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.”*** And if you don't believe all those things are in your heart, then add one more to the list: calling God a liar.

Dear fellow hypocrites, it's time to stop playing a part; it's time to come clean. It's time to repent.

Because that's what the phrase “to come clean” means! It doesn't mean what the Pharisees thought, and what so many today think – that I have to clean myself up before I can come to God, before He'll accept me. No! Isn't it interesting: the phrase “to come clean” means to confess; to come here unclean and admit that I am unclean. And for a Christian, to do so, so that Christ may make me clean. And He does! For it is the very thing He has promised to do. To clean us from *the inside out*, that who we are on the outside, and who we are on the inside, may not be different, but be one and the same.

**For so it was with Christ.** With us, words and deeds are often two different things. We say one thing, we do another. We make promises we cannot keep. We often play the part and wear the mask people expect of us. The mask of what we think a Christian is *supposed* to be like, not wanting others to know what we're *really* like, and the struggles of faith that we have. But you know what, all that doesn't help, does it? It just increases fear. The fear of being found out. The fear of being rejected.

**But it is not so with Christ.** For words and deeds are *not* two things with Him, but as the Word of God made flesh (John 1), *He is the Word of God brought to life*, that we may not only hear the Word of God, but see it. You know, we often use that phrase of movies and plays, that they are a particular book “brought to life.” But with those, there *are* actors playing a part and wearing masks. It is an *enactment*, not an *enfleshment*.

**But it is not so with Christ.** He is the very Word of God enfleshed and brought to life, and so when you see Him, you see the truth of God. When you see Him, you see God. When you hear Him, you hear God. He is no mask, no part, no play – as some early Christian heresies insisted. He is the real thing. All the Word of God brought to life in Him, and lived perfectly by Him, even when living that Word meant laying down His life for us on the cross. He does not make promises He cannot or will not keep. He does not

say what He does not mean. If Jesus said it, you can be sure of it. For His Word is no empty Word, but the Word of God that does what it says – from the beginning to the end; from creation to redemption. He speaks, and it is so.

And today He speaks to you and me to *stop* acting, to *stop* playing the hypocrite, that the Word of God may not just be *enacted* by us, but *enfleshed* in us.

And you see, that's the difference between all false religion and true religion. We prayed that in the Collect for the Day today: that God would "*increase in us true religion.*" It's kind of an odd phrase, until you realize what it means. It means that there is religion in this world that is false. Religion in this world that tells us to *enact* the Word of God; to act it on the outside as if that were good enough, or maybe in the hope that we would be helped and improved from the outside in. That by doing good, we would eventually become good.

But notice how different the Gospel, the true religion of Christ, which says do not just enact, but be enfleshed. You cannot change from the outside in. Acting good will never make you good. You must be changed from the inside out. And, the Gospel tells us, this is the very thing God would do for us! It is why He sent His Son into our world as the enfleshment of His Word. It is why He sends Him to us still today – to en flesh that same Word in us. That we no longer act or simply play a part, **but be who we are.**

And so when our once crucified but now living Saviour comes to us today, in water, in Word, and in bread and wine, it is so that the Word of God be enfleshed in us. It is not instruction, but transformation. It is not telling us to change, but changing us. It is not simply our determination to "start over" and live a new life, but *actually* dying and rising with our Saviour to live a new life! All of which is to say it is not something that we can do at all! But what our Saviour does for us. Coming to us and living in us. Forgiving our sins, turning our minds, cleansing our hearts, giving us His wisdom, "*increasing in us true religion.*"

For the true religion is this: *not* to act a part, but to repent and believe the good news! Believe that your God has done it all for you and saved you! That by coming in the flesh and taking all your sin upon Himself, that your sin has been atoned for. That if it is on Him then it is not on you. And that when you see your Saviour on the cross, humiliated, bleeding, and dying, then you are truly seeing the heart and love of God for you. There is no greater revelation. God loves you so much that He would rather He die than you die. And so He did, thus banishing your sin and death that you might live. That the Word of God be enfleshed in you by grace through faith. That you not *act* the part of a Christian, but *be* a Christian. And so you are.

So today, come clean again. Come unclean and be cleaned by your Saviour. Come repent and wash in His forgiveness; come eat and drink His body and blood; come to the Word of God enfleshed, that that same Word be enfleshed in you.

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.