

3 June 2012
The Feast of the Holy Trinity

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Not Good Enough No More”

Text: Isaiah 6:1-8; Acts 2:14a, 22-36; John 3:1-17

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

Whether you're at work, at school, on the playground choosing up sides, or trying out for a sport; 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. And so when he is given a 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**. Peter was right. 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*. **You're not good enough.**

And that's my message for you today, Professor Hensley, as you leave us and move to California to begin teaching there. **You're not good enough!**

Now, that's a fine going-away message, isn't it? But it's true. Though he is highly educated and trained and truly worthy and well-prepared for this teaching position *in the eyes of the world*, before God he is like you and I - **he is not worthy**. He is not worthy to be a pastor, a professor, or even a Christian. Neither am I. And neither are you. We are sinners. We sin in thought, word, and deed. We do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things. We disbelieve. We do not love our neighbor as ourselves. We give in to temptation out of weakness, for pleasure, because of pride, in anger. We hurt others. We lie and deceive. We want to be served, not serve others. No matter how holy and pious and good we may look to others on the outside, the truth is: we're not good enough. **You're not good enough.**

And yet . . . and yet God wants us here, with Him. Unworthy as we are. 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 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 Feast 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 that other stuff we will confess in the Athanasian Creed . . . 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 active, all working for you and for your salvation.

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. 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. Your *not good enough* is not good enough no more.

For Holy Trinity Sunday is about the one who is good. Who created this world good, and then came to restore its goodness after we, in sin, made 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, that's what happens. For touched by Him and joined to Him and His work for you, your status changes. You go from *not good enough* to **child of God!**

And that is what you now are. You, 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 preaching. For Nicodemus, it meant caring and serving. For Adam, it means now leaving this place to go and teach. For his family, it means going with him and supporting him, encouraging him, and loving him. For me, it means being your pastor and all that goes with that. And for you, it means giving the goodness God has given and worked in you to those around you - your family, your work, your school, your neighborhood, your country. That is the good you do. Not to be *good enough* - 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.

And it is in that confidence that we bid you farewell and godspeed today Adam, Joanna, Sammy, Mary, Johnno, and Lucy. *You're not good enough!* But our Lord has done great and good things for you. And as He has given you to us for these few years to be His good and blessing to us, He will now use you as His good and blessing to many folks in California. Our loss is their gain.

But as we gather one last time with you around our Lord's Table here, all of us who are not good enough to receive the good One, to receive His Body and Blood, to receive His good and perfect gifts, His forgiveness, life, and salvation together, we know this above all: there is really only one Table of our Lord. That no matter where we are we are one body in Him, and gathered with *the angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven*. And so as we gather here, and you gather there, we are 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.

For dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that is what our God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - has come to do for you. Make you new. No matter *who* you are, no matter *where* you are. To be a father to the fatherless, give hope to the hopeless, unite what has be torn apart, forgive the sinful, find the lost, care for those in need, raise the dead, and give you 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. *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.