

7 October 2018  
Pentecost 20

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“The Good Life”

Text: Mark 10:2-16; Hebrews 2:1-18; Genesis 2:18-25  
(Introit Antiphon: Psalm 127:1a)

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

*Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*

That’s what we heard in the Epistle today from Hebrews. And *what we have heard* is the Word of God. The Word spoken to us by God through His prophets, apostles, and evangelists. We must pay *closer attention* to it. For if we do not, if we are not tethered to it, if the Word of God is not in our minds and in our hearts, if the Word of God is not our anchor holding us fast . . . then we will *drift away from it*. Little by little, slowly but surely.

‘Cuz that’s the way it happens, isn’t it? We’re not believers one day and unbelievers the next. We usually don’t go from right to wrong in one great leap, but usually an inch at a time. Doubting what God has said. Listening to what we have heard from the world, not God. Giving in to our desires. Maybe it seems harmless at first. Drifting always does. You don’t notice. But before you know it, hearts once tender and open to the Word of God have grown hard in sin and unbelief. And the people and world God created good is so no longer.

So when the Pharisees approach Jesus one day, as we heard in the Holy Gospel today, notice what they ask - their question is not about what is good, but what is lawful. Or in other words, what do we have to do? What can we get away with? What loopholes are there? They’re really not interested in marriage, but with testing Jesus, tripping Him up, finding that ‘gotcha!’ question that will finally give them the victory over Him. They did it before and they’d do it again. All kinds of questions they asked Jesus. Marriage was just the topic of the day. So, *is it lawful*, Jesus? What do you say?

But Jesus isn’t about the law; Jesus is about the good. What’s good. What He made good. Because that’s who Jesus is, though the Pharisees don’t know it, or *won’t* know it. He is the God of all creation standing before them. The God who created *them*. The God who gives good gifts, like life and marriage. Gifts that are to be received with thanksgiving. But how far the Pharisees had drifted.

But still, surely, they know divorce is not good! Right? Surely, they know that! But *is it lawful*, Jesus? Can we do it anyway?

But did they know? How about us? Look at our world today. Look at marriage today. Do we know? What are we hearing from the world? Well, lots of things, right? But many are saying not that marriage is good, but that it is not good. Not the way God designed it, anyway. One man, one woman, one flesh, no one else allowed in, for a lifetime. I can marry whoever I want. I don't need a piece of paper to have sex or children. Go digital. Now, even, use life-like robots, so there are no messy emotions or strings attached. And divorce? Divorce is good. When I fall out of love. When I get tired of the other person. When someone better comes along. Marriage is not good, but the ol' ball and chain. Have your fun now, before you get married, because once you do . . .

How far we've drifted from the good God created. When God created someone who had never been before - a woman - and walked her down the aisle of Eden, and gave her to Adam and Adam to her. And they rejoiced in one another. Were one with one another. And from their oneness came more good - children. Though many don't consider them good anymore either. But accidents, inconveniences, that rather than effect my life can be put away with surgery, or now with a pill. And you know what? It's *lawful*.

So what's a God to do? With such hardness of heart? With people like us? 'Cuz its not just marriage, right? How far we've drifted from God's good in so many ways . . . and yet find ways to justify ourselves. Not asking whether what we're doing is good or not, but is it lawful? Or, can I get away with it?

So Jesus doesn't answer with the Law, but with the good. He takes them back to the beginning, before sin, to the good God created and gave. Yes, creation is fallen, and marriage with it. Marriage bonds are broken today, and not just by divorce, but by all kinds of abuse, desertion, adultery, and unfaithfulness. And remember, adultery doesn't just happen in the body, but in the mind, and in the heart . . . as do all sins (Matthew 5). The world's a mess. We are a mess. Fallen.

And just because we call something good doesn't mean it is. What's good is what God calls good. Things are what He says they are. And even in a fallen and sinful world, God still gives good. And marriage is still a good gift from God - not when we take it and do whatever we want with it and what we think is good! - but when it is received as God gives it. For remember when Adam and Eve took what was not given to them? . . . Yeah. And when we take what is not given to us - whether that's worship, honor, sex, money, power, control, whatever - it is also not good. And results in not good.

So, back to my question: What's a God to do? I know what He *should* have done - He should have written us a certificate of divorce and sent us away. Let us have what we

think is good and destroy ourselves, now and forever. But He didn't. Instead, He caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man - His Son made man, the second Adam - a three day sleep in death, that from His rising again, we might have life again. Good life. Born again, born from above, life. Children of God life. New creations from His side life; from the water and blood that flowed from His side life. That we might be good and holy brides, washed clean from our sin and ungoodness, and be one flesh with Him. Good again.

In this world and life, death usually separates the wife from her husband. But this death, Jesus' death, unites us to Him. For He joined us in our death, to unite us to himself in His resurrection. To leave the ungood from cold, hard hearts in the cold, hard grave, and raise us from our fallness to good again. That we have what is really good, that we have *life* - not because of a loophole in the Law, but in the forgiveness of our sins. Or as we sang: His Strong Word bespeaks us righteous (LSB #578). The washing away of our sins, of our not good, by Word and water and blood. The water of Baptism, the Word of Absolution, and the Blood of His Supper.

And this for *every* sin - none excepted. For every sin and failure in marriage. For every sin in thought, word, and deed. For every doubt and failure to listen to God's Word. For sins of our bodies and sins of our souls. For sins done in weakness and sins done deliberately. Jesus died for all of them, for all that is not good in us, no matter how ugly it is. He took it to the cross. He took it, that it be on Him and not on us. That infected and corrupted by our sin, He be made perfect through His suffering and death, that we be made perfect through His rising to life again. And you are! Because God says you are. His Strong Word makes it so. And the gift of good He gives to you now, His gift, that we can't do, only receive.

Which doesn't mean (as you sometimes wrongfully hear) that we can sin all we want because we know we'll be forgiven! If that's in your mind or in your heart, then you've drifted *a long way* from God and His Word; from God and His good. Rather, as we heard again in the reading from Hebrews, because He was ***made like us in every way***, and because ***He suffered when tempted*** - by the very same temptations that beset us - ***He is able to help us who are being tempted***. That we not give in. That we not lose the good. He anchors us to God and His Word, that we not drift away, but remain firm in Him.

And so rather than sin all we want because we know we'll be forgiven, He is able to help us keep the Sixth Commandment: *You shall not commit adultery*. Which means to *lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other*. And every other commandment, too. Not because it's the Law, because we have to, but to live the good life again. Not the good life of self-indulgence, but the good life that is His gift to us. Not a life of self-indulgence, but a life of love; of laying down our lives for others, and helping them not to sin, but remain anchored to God and His Word. It's the life Adam and Eve had before they took what was not given to them. The godly life. The life of Christ. The life we live here, now, in Him, and which we will

live in Him and with Him forever.

For as we sang in the Introit earlier: *unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.*

And He has built our houses - the houses of our bodies, the houses of our families, the house of our church, and the house of His kingdom - all His gifts to us. *And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good* (Genesis 1:31). And when there is evening and morning, the setting of the seventh day and the rising of the eighth day, the new day of resurrection and eternity, when all that is old and not good will pass away, and all that is new and good will rise, then we will see the good that has been here all along. And you will live the good life, finally, fully, and forever.

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.