

20 January 2019
The Second Sunday after Epiphany
Sanctity of Life Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Those People”

Text: John 2:1-11; Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

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

That person, those people, don't matter. Maybe you don't say that, but have you ever felt it, thought it, or acted like it?

That person doesn't matter, so I can belittle her, bully him, use him for a little fun even if it hurts him, or to make myself something at her expense.

Those people don't matter. They're not worth my bother, my time, my effort, my attention, my help. Is that why some sleep outside and go hungry? Or why so many are aborted, or mercy killed, or die alone?

Those people don't matter. In Jesus' day, Jews thought that of Samaritans and Samaritans of Jews. Slaves in America used to be thought of that way. Who else in our world today?

Those people don't matter. And maybe I, or the world, would be better off without them. Babies, the elderly, the suffering, the dying, the disabled.

Those people don't matter. But I do! Right? So . . . what can I get out of them? How can they help me? Serve me?

Those people don't matter. Maybe you don't say that, but do you feel it, think it, act like it? Has that attitude wormed its way into our hearts and minds and lives without our even realizing it? Or maybe you've ben one of *those people* . . .

Hard words. Hard for me to speak. Hard for you to hear. Hard for ME to hear. For my own words strike me down, convict me, too. For I have done this. You too? By my actions and by my inaction. My uncaring, negative thoughts. When I have lived as if *those people* don't matter . . . or, don't matter enough for me to do anything or be bothered. When I have lived as if those people don't matter and the only one who does is ME.

Those people don't matter. Words that I hope bring all of us to repentance today. But

words that can bring us joy too! In this way: **to know that these are words that are not and will never be uttered by God.**

For the message of Sanctity of Life Sunday is that *those people matter*. That YOU matter. And not just matter, but are precious to God. And that, to use the words of Isaiah, ***your God rejoices over you!*** And that you will be ***called by a new name - His name!*** - which He gives to you in Holy Baptism. Which seems incredible, knowing who we are, knowing our sin. But true nonetheless.

For *those people* - and you - were created by God, in His image. Knit together by Him in the womb (Psalm 139:14-15). Fearfully, wonderfully, and specially made. Even if sin has made us less than God created us and intended us to be.

Those people - and you - were redeemed by God. By the blood of God Himself, in the person of His Son, shed on the cross for you. He laid down His life for yours. He traded places with you. If you didn't matter, He wouldn't have done that.

Those people - and you - matter. No matter how old or how young, born or unborn, able or disabled, black, white, or some other color, Christian or non-Christian, big sinner or little sinner, Jew or Samaritan, Democrat or Republican, homeless or wealthy, slave or free, man or woman.

Those people - and you - matter. So Jesus came. For you. For them. Even to a wedding. Which seems like a waste of His busy and limited time, doesn't it? But that bride and groom that day mattered, and teach us something about how much we matter. For Jesus has come, as Isaiah said, ***to marry you***. To be the bridegroom for His bride, the Church.

For you need a bridegroom who will provide for you. And not just here in this life, but in the next as well. A bridegroom who will love and cherish you for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, and one that not even death can part you from. So He entered death and defeated death, because you matter. To give you the life you need.

And in this life, you need purification from your sin, but six stone water jars is not enough. In fact, all the water in the world is not enough! But water combined with His Word is water that is not just water anymore, but becomes wine that is needed at a wedding, and becomes baptism today - the rich and full washing away of sin that is needed today by you and me.

And you need joy in the midst of this world of sin and struggle and sadness, but not the joy that comes from much wine, that lasts only for a while and then leaves you hung over, but joy that comes from the wine that forgives your sins! Wine that with the Word of Jesus is not just wine anymore, but the Blood of your Saviour, the blood that forgives

you and strengthens you, along with the bread that is not just bread anymore, but His Body.

For you matter. And this - Jesus' first sign - teaches us that. For it seems like a strange first sign, doesn't it? Of all the first signs that Jesus could have done, *this*? But it sets the stage, helps us understand all the rest. Jesus' hour had not yet come, but it was coming. The hour when Jesus would do a far greater thing than change water into wine. The hour He would change death into life with His resurrection. That would happen ***on the third day***, too. Just like this miracle/sign.

For you matter. Your life matters to Him. Your death matters to Him. And the life and death of *those people*, too, (whoever they are) matter to Him. So for *those people* He died. For you He died. That you live. And not just a little. Not just enough to get by. But that you have *abundant life* (John 10:10).

For like this wedding at Cana, how often things in life start out joyful. Marriages, friendships, jobs, churches, holidays, families . . . but then something happens. Wedding feasts run out of wine. We run out of patience. Sin erupts from within us or upon us. Tragedy interrupts. Strife rears its ugly head. Small disagreements grow into big disputes. And what started so joyful . . . We try to get by. Make the best of a bad situation. Good enough, we try for. And are satisfied if we can get that.

Not Jesus. Good enough is not good enough for Him. Nothing but the best for Him. And so the wine taken to the steward is the good stuff, the best. And the life Jesus has for you is the same. The good, the best isn't over and in the past - it is still to come. The hour when all sin and death will be vanquished, once and for all, and only life and joy remain. At *His* wedding feast. The wedding feast of heaven, which will never end and never run out of joy or life.

For you matter. Those people matter. And God gives nothing but the best. We might settle for less, but He never will.

And to this end, then also He gives you His Spirit. Not the same to all, but not because some matter and some don't. No. ***To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good***, Paul says. God gives, God blesses you with His Spirit, for your good and also for the good of others. That you be His blessing to them, and they to you. To *those people*. Because they matter.

It is the devil who has lied to us and convinced us that some people, *those people*, don't matter. We are to be our brother's keeper, no matter who our brother - or sister - is. And we can, because the Son of God came to be *our* brother and keep us, provide for us, love us, and save us. And because he did, we do. Because He did, we can. With Him, with His Spirit, with His forgiveness, with His Word, with His life. You matter to Jesus.

At the very end of the funeral liturgy, when we are standing by the graveside of a Christian and entrusting the body of our loved one to God, we say these words:

*May God the Father, who created this body;
may God the Son, who by His blood redeemed this body;
may God the Holy Spirit, who by Holy Baptism sanctified this body to be His temple,
keep these remains to the day of the resurrection of all flesh.*

It is a good reminder to us of the great care God takes for life, from beginning to end. How precious it is in His eyes. Which sadly, we sometimes only realize when someone dies; when they've departed from us. That God created them special, redeemed them in His love, and sanctified them for life with others and with Him.

But why wait for the funeral? Perhaps this is how we should look at others now. Not that *those people don't matter*, but that they matter because our Father created them, the Son redeemed them, and the Holy Spirit wants to sanctify them. They matter to Him so they matter to me.

Those people do matter. That is the attitude not wormed, but worded and baptized and bodied and blooded into your hearts and minds and lives.

Those people do matter, and are worth my time and energy and bother.

Those people do matter, and so there is forgiveness for them. And for you. For you, if you've had an abortion. For you, if you've made a mess of your life or someone else's life. For you, if you haven't been the Christian, the person, you should be. For you, if you've been one of those people to *those people*. You are forgiven!

Those people do matter, so I will speak Christ's Word and forgiveness to them, even as Christ speaks them to me.

Those people do matter, so I will defend them. The unborn, the elderly, the sick, the dying, the fragile, the outcast. I will speak for them, just as Christ defends, cares, and speaks up for me.

Those people do matter, so I will pray for them, as Christ prays for me.

Those people do matter. That is the word spoken by God most loudly when He hung in silence on the cross. *You matter.* That's why I'm here, bleeding and dying for you. And that is the word we proclaim today. Not just on this Sanctity of Life Sunday, but every day. Until this, Jesus' first sign, be fulfilled at the last, when the hour comes and He comes again, and the wedding feast begins.

Those people do matter. You matter! Thanks be to God!

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.