

28 June 2026
Pentecost 5

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Rightly Ordered Loves”

Text: Matthew 10:34-42; Jeremiah 28:5-9

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

It's a good thing the Holy Gospel for today wasn't read last Sunday - Father's Day! To hear that Jesus had ***come to set a man against his father*** - that would have been awkward! But, of course, it still is. *Quite* awkward. No matter which week we hear it. Jesus the home wrecker.

Today's Gospel is the last of three where Jesus is instructing His disciples before sending them out. As you may remember, it started out so well! He ***gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction***. . . . He told them to ***heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons***. That's cool. But then it was all downhill from there . . . Things go from bad to worse.

They're going to face rejection. They're going out *as sheep in the midst of wolves*. They will be handed over to the authorities. They're going to be hated and called demons. *And now this we heard today!* So maybe they're having second thoughts? Couldn't blame them!

And that happens to Christians today . . . maybe even you. Second thoughts, when you hear God's Word and what it says.

I mean, Christmas and baby Jesus is cool. *O Little Town of Bethlehem, Silent Night, candles, Joy to the World*. Like that! And Easter - the flowers and alleluias. Good stuff. Love and joy and peace - who doesn't want that?

But stick around, and then you begin to hear more . . . Things like: your enemies? Love them! Those who persecute you and make your life tough, pray for them! Turn the other cheek. Lay down your life for others. Forgive without limit. Don't repay evil for evil, but repay evil with good. Be sexually pure, honor the authorities, no matter who they are . . . and then things like we heard today. That as a Christian, you may have to give up some things; change some things about your life. Not to win God's favor - you already have that! But because they're not good for you, even if you

think they are.

Hmmm. This Christian thing, this Jesus thing . . . I didn't know it was going to be so hard!

But this is how it has been, the pattern of things, from the beginning. When because of the sin of Adam and Eve, things plummeted from great to worse. From perfection to death and hell on earth.

So what kept them going . . . all the saints of old, living in such a world? From Noah, to Abraham, to Moses, to David, the prophets - what kept them going in the midst of the opposition and pain and struggle? One thing only, really - **the promise of a Saviour**, who would raise them and this world to life and love, peace and joy, again. And so the book of Hebrews says that all those saints of old, they could have gone back; they could have just thrown up their hands and given up . . . like maybe some are tempted to today. But instead, they looked forward to what was coming. To the greater, the more glorious, the restoration. So going back, giving up, really wasn't an option. There wasn't any guarantee that would be easier or better anyway. The good ol' days usually aren't as good as we remember or imagine.

Which brings us back to the words Jesus spoke to His disciples today . . . these tough words!

The thing to know about those words, to help us understand them, is that Jesus wasn't the first to say them. They were first said by the prophet Micah, describing the evil and wickedness in the world. This was their reality. This was happening in Israel. They were turning against one another - even families! They weren't living as God's people. There were false prophets in those days, too - one we heard of today in the Old Testament reading, named Hananiah - false prophets who were saying in the midst of all the wickedness and evil: *Don't worry! Be happy! All is well.* Even though they had been conquered by the Babylonians and many people had been taken there from Israel, it won't last long! Hananiah said. God's going to bring you back. And soon. We are His people, after all!

But that wasn't true, the prophet Jeremiah said. I wish it were! he said. We're His people, *yes*. But God was disciplining His people, and it was going to last the full 70 years, as God had said.

So you had these two prophets - and more - saying different things. Not unlike today, where you have lots of different people saying lots of different things, about God, about life, about truth . . . sometimes making it hard to know what to believe.

So what did Micah say, living in that situation? After being the first to say these words about families divided? He said this, in the very next verse: *But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.* That's exactly what the saints of old did. Looking forward, not back; looking to the Lord, and no other; and waiting for His salvation, not taking matters into their own hands. No matter how great the evil or how bad the wickedness in them and in the world, they looked to the Lord for forgiveness and waited for the Lord to come and fulfill His promises. For He always does.

So by Jesus taking up these words of the prophet Micah and quoting these *shocking* words - by doing so He wants you to think about four things:

First, the condition of the world, how steeped in sin and rebellion and division it is, as it was in Micah's day.

Second, to think about the condition of your heart, and the sin that has maybe snuck its way in and that maybe you are a little too comfortable with, as the people's in Micah's day.

Third, that He is proclaiming that He is the one Micah and the saints of old looked forward to, the save from this mess.

And then fourth, He wants you to do the same; to look forward as well, to Him and His salvation. His salvation coming not only on the Last Day, but already here, already now, in His Word and Sacraments.

For Jesus doesn't hate families! There's a commandment, in fact, about honoring your father and mother - remember that? And its importance is shown by its being the *first* commandment in the second table of the Law, about loving your neighbor. That placement is important, and the commandment is important. And Jesus isn't contradicting that Word of God. But important also are the commandments that come before it, regarding God; the first table of the Law. And we can never pit them against one another. But living in a world steeped with sin - sin without, sin within, sin all around! . . . what if there comes a time when honoring God and honoring my father go against one another and I can't do both? What then? Which do I do? And what of other situations - *impossible* situations - when it seems like of the choices I have, both are wrong? That no matter which I do *I'm sinning*?

And you begin to realize . . . I'm the one Jesus was taking about. **I am not worthy.** And I can't be. And if it were up to me, I never will be! Hard as I might try. Full stop. Because these situations come up. And I have crosses I *don't* carry and *won't* carry. *I* have divided loves. I do try to save my life, what I have, what I've done. The world

may be a mess, *but so am I*.

It's good to know that. Hard! But good. Not so that we'll throw our hands up, give up, and stop trying. But so that we look for help in the right place. Not within ourselves and what we can do - but that we look forward and look to Jesus. The only one who ever was and is worthy, and who came to make you worthy.

Because the truth is that Jesus didn't come to wreck families, He came to wreck you!

You who are wrecked with sin, divided loves, and doubts - He came to finish you off! To kill you, so that He could raise you to a new life. The sword of His Word slaying you in repentance, so that His healing Word of Absolution raise you again in forgiveness to a new life. That you find your hope in Him and turn to Him alone.

But to do that, to save you like that, Jesus had to be slain Himself. He had to take your place under the sword of God's wrath Himself. Take your sin, take your guilt, take your shame, take your divided loves, take your doubts, take your unworthiness, take it all away from you and *lose His* life to *give you* life. That in His resurrection, you rise, too. That joined to Him in Baptism and made His child, you find your life in Him. So that knowing the depth and enormity of our sin, we also know the greatness and glory of our Saviour.

And then, baby steps. Receiving a prophet, to listen to him speak God's Word. A cup of cold water to a little one. And a reward . . . *for that?* Yeah!

And maybe a Father's Day example here - a week late! When children are little, the gifts they give are small, usually homemade, but precious. When they get bigger, the gifts might get bigger and more expensive. But isn't it those little gifts that are remembered and kept? The drawing, the little plaster handprints, the homemade card. What we do is like that. What you do - so little and rudimentary - when done in love, when done as His child, is precious to your Father in heaven.

That's what makes you and what you do worthy. Not that what you do is perfect or even close to it, but that you're His dearly loved child, adopted into His family, by Baptism, washed clean in the blood of the Son, and with a seat at His Table. When you're not here, He misses you. When you rebel, He grieves. When you repent, He rejoices, and He lavishes His love and forgiveness on you. And when you do those little, rudimentary, imperfect things, trying to be like Him, He loves it.

So Jesus is no home wrecker. He is, in fact, a home builder. It is the sin in our world that has wrecked our homes and lives and disordered our loves. It is only His forgiveness and life and love that can restore them, and His forgiveness and life and love that also gives us a new home, and a new family - a family of faith and a

heavenly home. If you want to save your life in this messed up, disordered, wicked world, you can. You can do that . . . But why? You have another life, one without the sin and death and evil, that will last forever. Maybe that's the one worth saving?

So love those God has given you to love, as Jesus did His earthly family. But *even more*, love Him who gave them to you, and gave Himself for you. And then, in Him, you'll find not one pitted against the other, but your loves ordered rightly.

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.