

27 July 2003  
Pentecost 7

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Whose the Offensive One?”

Text: Mark 6:1-6 (2 Cor. 12:7-10)

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

You may have seen in the news that Private Jessica Lynch went home this week. She was the injured prisoner of war in Iraq who was rescued in a nighttime raid, and after many months of hospitalization, she got to go home this week. And what a homecoming she had. All the major media was there. She rode in a parade through town in a convertible waving to everyone, people lined the streets waving flags, there were bands and speakers. Even those in this town who probably didn't know Jessica Lynch before claimed her as their own and showed up on the street that day. It was quite a scene. And then after the parade through town, Jessica was given the microphone and all got to hear her speak as she thanked everyone for coming out and said all the right things – everything that was expected of her. It was a good day that left everyone feeling good.

But what if it had turned out a little different than that? What if, once given the microphone, Jessica had said a few *different* things? What if she had asked the people where their support for the war was *before she*, their hometown girl, got injured and captured? What if she called them hypocrites for jumping on the bandwagon now that the war was over? What if she questioned their patriotism and asked if all this wasn't just a show for the TV cameras? The day would have turned out a bit differently, don't you think? The people would have taken *offense* at her.

Now you know what happened that day in Nazareth, when Jesus went home. It was supposed to be a day that left everyone feeling good. Hugs and kisses from family. Handshakes and pats on the back from friends and former co-workers. Even admiration from those who perhaps hadn't known Him so well before, but had now heard of all that He had been doing. He was a well-respected teacher. He was doing mighty works. Word had gotten around, and they were proud – one of their own, doing great things. And so on that Sabbath the synagogue was probably unusually crowded, the whole town coming out, to listen to Jesus preach. . . . But Jesus didn't say what they expected Him to say. They were *astonished*, and not in a good way, at what He said. “*Who does this guy think He is? Where did He get these things? Why is He speaking like this?*” **And**

*the people took offense at Him.*

So what did Jesus say that caused such offense? Mark does not record those words for us, but from what we read in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels, and from what we know of the other preaching and teaching of Jesus, we pretty well know what He said. ***Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*** Repent, because they are sinners. Repent, and believe that the One spoken of by the prophets of the Old Testament, the One who would do the works of God, the One who would save them from their sins, is here. Here and sitting before them now. Repent and believe.

And because of that message, *the people took offense at Him.*

Now be clear why the people took offense at Jesus. It probably was not because of what He claimed about Himself. If He had just talked about Himself, and that He was God and a Saviour, they could have dismissed that and dismissed Him as a lunatic, and they would have went home shaking their heads in sadness, not offense. No, it wasn't the claims He made about Himself that offended the people, *it was the claims He made on them.* Calling them sinners. Calling them to repentance. He could have talked about Himself all He wanted, but once He started talking about them, and accusing them – that's crossing the line!

And that's the way it is in the church and in the world today. Jesus, and the church, and religion are all okay with most folks. We can have a church and we can meet all we want and people won't much care. In fact, they may even like some of the things the church does for the community in feeding and clothing the poor and other service projects. And some folks may even come and join a church. As long as we leave them alone. As long as we don't make claims on them. But if we do, that's crossing the line. . . . You've heard people talk about this; you've heard the phrases: *Don't force your morality on me. Don't force your truth on me.* Or one of my favorites, that I heard frequently in New York: *Don't go there, Pastor, don't go there!* Or in other words, you can preach to them all you want. You can make claims on all the other people all you want. But don't talk about my sin. Don't tell me to repent. Don't make claims on me – that's crossing the line!

From Nazareth, to Jerusalem, to Vienna, VA, Jesus is okay as long as He thanks everyone for coming out and says all the right things. But start making claims, start making claims on us – especially about our sin and our need for repentance and humility, about our helplessness and rebellion, about our neediness and depravity and our love for our sins, our pet sins, those things we know are wrong but we like so much . . . nuh-uh. Tell us we're not okay, or to give up our pet sins, or to change our thinking – that's crossing the

line. *We're offended.*

Did you hear that? I mean, did you hear it? We're the ones who are offended? Us, the ones who offend God by sinning against Him? *We're offended*, the ones who love the things of this world more than we love God? *We're offended*, the ones who misuse God's Name and don't speak up for God because we're afraid of what others are going to say and think about us? *We're offended*, the ones who have God's Word but neglect it and don't even know what half of it says? *We're offended*, the ones who rebel against our parents and other authorities – those God has put here for our good? *We're offended*, the ones who abort our children, who want to put down older folks because they're in the way, who hate and injure our neighbors and those we should be helping? *We're offended*, the ones who have perverted God's gift of sexuality and act more like animals? *We're offended*, the ones who want more than God has given us and often do whatever it takes to get what we want, even at the expense of our neighbor? *We're offended*, the ones who gossip and lie and like to think the worst about those around us? *We're offended*, the ones who are jealous of others and think God is somehow being unfair with us? *We're offended?! Do we even hear how ridiculous we sound? We're offended!?* Who are really the offensive ones here? What kind of gall does it take to tell God, "*God, don't go there! You're crossing the line. You're not staying where you belong in my life!*" I mean, really!

But, in a strange and twisted way, there is a truth there: that God did cross the line. The fact that He was there that day in Nazareth, and the fact that He is here this day, is evidence of the fact that God crossed the line. He crossed the line between God and man and became man. He crossed the line between perfection and sin and became sin. He crossed the line between life and death and the author of life died our death. God did cross the line that we had crossed – the line of sin and death – **to re-claim us as His own.** And so He came. He came and claimed our humanity. He came and claimed our sin. He came and claimed our punishment. He came and claimed our death and damnation. He came and claimed it all. *That's the cross!* That's our humanity, our sin, our guilt, our punishment, our death and damnation, our offense. That's what we deserve. That's what we've earned. That's the line that we crossed.

But in the person of Jesus Christ, God came and crossed that line with us. And if we say to God, *God, don't go there* – because we don't want our sin exposed, because we don't want to admit our guilt and rebellion, because we just want to feel good about ourselves – then we are really saying that we want to go there by ourselves! But if we go there by ourselves, *we will never come back.* Our sin, our guilt, our punishment, our offense, our death and damnation will consume us. . . . But God came and crossed the line with us, to bring us back. He crossed the line into death so that in His resurrection from death to

life, we too could rise again, and be born again to a new life. A new life with our sin and guilt **forgiven**. A new life with all the punishment against our sin already handed out. A new life with all of our offenses against God gone. A new life with our death and damnation defeated. A new life in Christ Jesus where, like the apostle Paul, we can *boast* of our weaknesses. Not that we boast in our sin and go on sinning and not care about what we do – no, that’s not who we are anymore in Christ Jesus. Rather, in weakness, we repent. We stop trying to do it ourselves. We stop relying on our own wisdom and strength. We stop taking offense at Jesus and instead live in Him and His Word. **“For when I am weak, then I am strong.”** In the weakness of repentance and faith, we are strong in the One who crossed the line from life into death, so that He could take us from death into life.

And that we might not take offense at Christ but rather be found in Him is what we pray for every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer. We must pray for it, for we cannot do it ourselves. And so we pray **Thy Kingdom come**. *What does this mean? The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also.* We pray that it may come to us. **How does God’s kingdom come? God’s kingdom comes when our Heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.** . . . Or in other words, God’s Kingdom comes when God *crosses the line* and come to us. To come to us and give us His Spirit. To come to us and give us faith. To come to us and keep us in Him, because we cannot do it ourselves. And our Saviour does. He has promised us. For He has promised that not only 2,000 years ago in Nazareth would He be present with us in flesh and blood – He promised that **“I am with you always.”** And so He is here – speaking to us through His Word, declaring to us the forgiveness of our sins, washing us clean in the waters of Holy Baptism, and feeding us with His body and blood. Teaching us, renewing us, forgiving us, strengthening us, keeping us. Bringing His kingdom to us, so that in the end, He can take us to His kingdom.

What happened in that synagogue in Nazareth that day is really what takes place here each Sunday. Jesus comes to us, and speaks to us, and makes claims – about Himself, and about us. And we can be offended, or we can repent. . . . But know that your prayer is being answered here. The Kingdom of God is at hand. The Kingdom of God is here, for you. Christ, your Saviour, is here, with His gifts; with His forgiveness. He has crossed the line and is here **for you**. So come and receive, until you get to go home, to the joyous homecoming welcome in Heaven.

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.