

29 January 2006  
Epiphany 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“A Greater Prophet, a Greater Exodus”

Text: Mark 1:21-28; Deuteronomy 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

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

The book of Deuteronomy is a book of sermons. Sermons preached by Moses to the people of Israel just before entering the land God had promised to give them. God had seen them through over 400 years of slavery in Egypt, and 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. And now they stood on the banks of the Jordan. The Promised Land was in sight. The long-awaited “land of milk and honey” . . . they could *taste* it! They were almost there! All they had to do was cross this river.

But before they do, Moses preaches to them. He reminds them of all they have been through. Of God’s promises and faithfulness. Their deliverance; God’s mighty acts; the plagues, the Red Sea, the protecting and guiding pillars of cloud and fire, the food and water miraculously provided for them, God’s Word delivered at Horeb, on Mt. Sinai. Remember, Moses pleads, and believe. . . . And repent! For Moses also reminds them of their rebellion and stubbornness; of their sin. The demons of Egypt are not so easy to leave behind. For Moses knows all too well: **you can take the people out of Egypt, but it’s another thing to take the Egypt of out of the people.**

And so even as they stand at the door to a new land and a new life, Moses points them to the future; a *greater* future than what they are even anticipating. For God is going to raise up *another* prophet, he says. Like him, but greater than him. For a *greater* deliverance, with a *greater* Word, to a *greater* land. To do what Moses is unable to do. The work of God here – in the exodus, at the Jordan – is not the end, but only the prelude. *Just wait and see what God has in store next!*

Now fast-forward in time to Capernaum, Galilee. The people have gathered in the synagogue to hear the Word of God. And what they will hear is actually what the people on the border of the Promised Land heard – they will hear Moses. For the five most important books of the Bible to any Jew were the first five books: the books of Moses,

called the Pentateuch – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And while we are not told what Scripture was read in the synagogue *that day*, I like to think it was the words of Moses that we too heard today. Of the coming prophet greater than Moses. . . . Because in response to this Word of God and Jesus’ teaching of it, immediately a man with an unclean spirit confronts Jesus – or (perhaps we should say) interrupts Him. Why? Because the demons in this man *know* – they know who Jesus is; they know what Jesus can do; they know He is the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy! And so they cry out at Him in fear and anguish, to which Jesus commands *an exodus*: **“Silence! Come out!”** And it is finished. There is peace and quiet, both within the synagogue, and within the man.

The people are amazed. A new teaching with authority. But they should not have been amazed. This is what God had promised, and what God promises, He does. The long-awaited prophet greater than Moses is here. With a greater word, and a greater exodus. To exorcise the demons of Egypt. **To not just take the people out of Egypt, but to take the Egypt out of the people.** To complete the exodus from Egypt with His own death and resurrection, to take us to the Promised Land of Heaven. He has come with the full authority of God, for He is God. The Son of God come down and made man, to lead us men out of the Egypt of our sins, and into Paradise.

Now, you’d think the people would say, “Great! Let’s go! Follow Jesus!” Right? But it’s never quite so easy, is it? For the people of Moses’ time, the people of Jesus’ time, and us today, the status quo is awful powerful, *and the exodus is hard*. And so not long after starting on the way, the people under Moses preferred the comforts of slavery to the struggles of freedom, and the pains of pilgrimage. The manna God provided was never tasty enough. God never lived up to their expectations; they longed for an easier way. . . . And what about the people of Jesus’ time? And what about you and me? *Do we really want an exodus?* Or instead of the land of milk and honey, do we long instead for the comfortable, suburban life of *silk and money*? Do we wallow in the comforts and pleasures of sin instead of struggling in the freedom of repentance and forgiveness? Are the blessings of God never tasty enough? Do we long for an easier way? A way without stubborn children, meager incomes, failing health, demanding work, and judgmental friends? A way with a perfect church and synod where we do not have to struggle for the truth? A way where we never have to struggle with God, where He plainly and clearly shows us all the who, what, where, when, and whys of our lives? An easy way with an easy God . . .

**You can take us out of Egypt, but it’s another thing to take the Egypt of out of us.**

Yet just as in Capernaum, Galilee, so too here today. The prophet greater than Moses is here to exorcise some demons, to take the Egypt out of us, and make us His! Men, women and children of unclean spirit come to this font, as little Analiese Eva Grindstaff will do in just a couple of weeks, and the prophet greater than Moses will command, “*Depart unclean spirit and make way for the Holy Spirit.*” And it will be so. We poor, miserable sinners come and repent of our sins, and by His Word and authority our sins are forgiven. And we rebellious and stubborn wanderers in the desert of this world of sin and death come to this altar hungry and thirsty, and the Son of God provides for us with His body to eat and His blood to drink, to strengthen us in the pilgrimage, to forgive the sin that loads us down, and to give us a foretaste of the feast to come in the Promised Land of Heaven. He never promised us it would be easy. He never promised us that He would be easy! But He has promised us the exodus and the salvation and forgiveness that we need to make it through this life, and that He gives – not just a bit here and a bit there – but in abundance. Giving us His grace, filling us with His gifts, and putting Himself in us and us in Him, making us His own. As much a part of Him as His own body.

And so in Him, our exodus is complete. The Son of God comes down from Heaven and is born a man, to join Himself to us and us to Him. And so His journey through this life is now, by faith, our journey. **As it is for Jesus, so it is for us, in Him.** He keeps the Law perfect in every point and in Him, so have we. He dies on the cross and our sins die with Him. He rises from the dead and we rise to life with Him. He ascends into Heaven, and we are there with Him. His exodus is complete, and so also, then, is ours! The gates of Paradise are opened again! All has been accomplished. It is finished. All that is left for us now is to cross the river, through death and the grave, and to the life that is waiting for us in Heaven.

Do not fear this, for it is a death you have already passed through, in your Saviour. The watery grave of your baptism has secured your passage and defeated the Satanic enemy, no less than did the waters of the Red Sea for the Israelites. When the time of your pilgrimage is over, the Promised Land is yours. Bought by the blood of your Saviour. Guaranteed by His Spirit given to you. Until then, we hear His Word preached, we wash it in daily, we eat and drink it, for it is His Word of life and forgiveness. Given to you, in this exodus, *to strengthen and preserve your faith, steadfast, unto everlasting life.* Until you *depart in peace.*

So now, on the way, live, child of God, as the child that you are. Not in fear, but in confidence! Not in slavery to sin, but in the freedom of Christ. Not captive to the things

of this world, but using your freedom to serve others. That they too may see and know the truth of Christ, and all that He is, and all that He has done. So Paul tells the Corinthians, and so he tells us.

**So leave Egypt behind!** For a new and greater land is waiting for you. You have been born again. Your kingdom is not of this world. What God is doing in you and through you now is not the end, but only the prelude. Just wait and see what God has in store next! It is all yours, for God has made you all His.

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 Christ Jesus our Lord unto everlasting life. Amen.

*(Thanks to the Rev. Chad Bird [Christ Crucified, p. 19] for some of the thoughts and words used in this sermon.)*