

5 April 2006  
Lent 5 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

### “The Promise of a Cosmopolitan Exodus”

Sometimes it sounds like God has bitten off more than He can chew; and promised more than He can deliver. Oh, not in theory, of course. In theory, God is the almighty and can do whatever He so chooses to do. But theory is theory and life is life, and sometimes theories and abstract promises don't seem much good in life, especially when you're in exile, when the chips are down, when nothing seems to be going right and it seems as if you're in over your head. *Then what?*

Well *then*, we remember that God's promises are never abstract words, but are concrete realities; and that His promises – unlike our promises – are not just words that may or may not come true, but are, in fact, declarations of the truth; and the most sure and certain thing on this earth. And so it was at Jericho, when God promised that lung power alone would topple walls that every great military planner of the time said were impregnable. So it was in the wilderness, when against all common sense, God promised that by gazing at a bronze snake on a poll they would be cured of their snake bites. So it was when God promised Lot at Sodom that the city was going to be reduced to one big ash tray by the morning. And so it was with Abraham and Sarah, when God promised that this nonagenarian couple was going to have a baby. And Sarah laughed. *How can this be?* We may shake our heads and like Sarah, laugh in doubt, but God always has the last laugh. The walls came down, the people were cured, Sodom was incinerated, and a child of promise was born. A child through whom God would keep His promise to bless all the nations of the earth. For God does what He says, *without fail*.

And so it is with the promise that we heard this evening, from the prophet Isaiah. *The promise of the greatest return from exile of all*. The promise that Abraham's descendants through Isaac, whose numbers are more numerous than the sands on the seashore and the stars in the sky, who are scattered here, there, and everywhere, would be gathered together once more to Jerusalem. Sure, God had brought His people out of Egypt, but this time God will extend His hand to recover the remnant of His people not only from Egypt, but from Assyria, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the coastlands of the sea. And Isaiah, while you're at it, why not throw in there America, Australia, Germany, Mexico, Russia, and Japan? Why limit this great exodus to just Israel? Why not include the Gentiles as well, and

make this a truly *cosmopolitan* exodus? To which Isaiah would respond: *That's exactly what I've done!* For he goes on to preach that “[*God*] will raise a signal [*or banner*] for the nations [*the Gentiles*] and will assemble the banished of Israel . . . [*and all this*] from the four corners of the earth.” You see, no one is excluded, in this greatest exodus of all. And if you think God’s promises up to now were great, well, *you ain’t seen nothin’ yet!*

But it does seem near impossible, doesn’t it? Look at how fractured our world is today! Look at all the hostilities, both ancient and modern, that keep bubbling to the surface of world history! Look at all the hatred and envy, the jealousy and harassment, the wars and bloodshed – in the name of power, in the name of progress, even in the name of God. Look at the problems and struggles, the trouble and turmoil, in your own life! How could all these enemies – represented by Isaiah as Philistines, Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites – be overcome? Are we now playing the part of Sarah – laughing *and doubting?*

Well *repent*. For as I said before, God’s promises are never just abstract words, but are always concrete realities. **And so too this promise.** For some 700 years after Isaiah spoke these words of promise, God set them into action . . . in another, perhaps laughable, way. When in David’s hometown, a baby was born and laid in a feed trough. And this baby, like all other babies, was also unlike all others. For here was God in the flesh, come to reign over not a geographic nation, but a nation whose citizens were scattered over the four corners of the globe. For as He Himself preached, when He is lifted up on the cross, He will draw **all men** to Himself. (Jn 12:32) He will be a shepherd not only over the flock of the Jews, but *the flock of the Gentiles as well*, so there will be one flock and one shepherd. (Jn 10:16) And He sends out His apostles **into all the world**, to make disciples of all nations, by baptizing and teaching. (Mt 28:20)

And what He promises, He does. For His word is fact; it is truth. And so for all men, for Jew *and* Gentile, for all the world, the Seed of Abraham undergoes His own bloody exodus from the city of Jerusalem, up the mount called Golgotha, and onto the tree of the knowledge that God loves you. Gentiles drive steel through His royal flesh, Jews heap abuse upon it, until finally, the breath that breathed life into Adam now breathes His last, in death. And the demons laugh. The Life is a corpse. The Word is silent. One day, two days, three.

But then comes the *true* laughter! The day Abraham saw and rejoiced; the day of Isaiah’s prophesy; the day when Jesus climbs out of the tomb, making Jericho, Sodom, wilderness, and all the rest look like child’s play! For here is the true and final exodus, the toppling of the prince of this world, the end of the hostilities between God and man, the captivity of captivity and the death of death! The un-accomplishable is accomplished, and every last bit of it – *do*

*you see?* – is **for you!** A promise fulfilled. To give life to you who are dead. To give breath to you who are breathless. To give hope to you who are hopeless. To give forgiveness to you who are in exile in sin, and to thus bring you home. Home to Israel; home to the church; home to our Father in Heaven.

And therefore now, God says to you, *laugh!* Laugh not in doubt, but in joy; not in fear, but in confidence; not in sin, but in His forgiveness, life, and salvation! For now is fulfilled all that Isaiah foretold. Lift up your eyes and see all the nations turned upside down; see spilling out of them men and women, boys and girls, every color of the rainbow, streaming to Jesus. From Assyria to America, from Egypt to Japan, indeed from the four corners of the globe, those once fettered in sin are freed in Jesus. For in His own bloody exodus from the city of Jerusalem, the Son of God paved the way for all of you – for the whole world – to enter the heavenly Jerusalem, the church of the living God. And before Him, all our enemies tuck their tails between their legs and head for the hills. The fear they seek to put in us has now been put in them. For it was the devil who bit off more than he could chew, when he convinced Adam and Eve to start eating up the wrong tree!

And of this triumphant pilgrim throng you are a part. No matter who you are or what you've done; no matter the mud and muck of life you seem stuck in right now, you are a part of this exodus. Sin, death, shame, regret, failure – all of you, begone! You have no power, no claim over the children of God. You have been drowned in the sea of the font; you have been buried and banished to the grave. ***It is finished*** our Saviour said. And it is finished. For His Word is fact; it is truth. The exodus of exoduses has been accomplished by the Lord of lords, all to bring you into the Holy of Holies above. And without fail, Jesus has done it. And He has done it all **for you**. Not He *will* do it – He *has* done it. So do not fear, do not doubt. He who sits in the heavens, at the Father's right hand, laughs (Ps 2:4); and so you too. For He has kept His promise. The last laugh is His, and so it is ours as well. Welcome home.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.