

24 February 2013

Lent 2

The Baptism of Robert Jordan Libby

Farewell and Godspeed to Seminarian George Fields

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church

Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Safe Under the Shelter of His Wings”

Text: Luke 13:31-35 (Jeremiah 26:8-15; Philippians 3:17-4:1)

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

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to [Jesus], “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.”

Don't think the Pharisees were being Jesus' buddies here. Since their opposition to Jesus wasn't gaining much popular support and their trick questions weren't proving to be very tricky to Jesus at all, they tried a new approach. Maybe they could scare Him. Invoke the infamous name of Herod and maybe Jesus will try to save His own skin. But as with all their other attempts to get rid of, undermine, or discredit Jesus, it doesn't work.

Did Herod really want to kill Jesus? We're not told, but it certainly would be quite in keeping with the usual activities of the Herod family. From the slaughtering of those babies in Bethlehem when Jesus was born, to the killing of James soon after Jesus ascended.

*But Jesus didn't come to save His own skin, He came to save yours. **I will finish my course**, He says. On the third day. A reference to His resurrection. That yes, He would die, but not at the hands of Herod, but at the hands of His own people, from His own holy city, Jerusalem. They wouldn't take His life, He would lay it down; He wouldn't resist. For this is why He came. He would die to defeat death. He would be slain at the hands of sinners for the forgiveness of their sins. He would be laid in a grave to then burst its cold, stoney grip. He would finish what He came to do. We may leave when the going gets tough, but not Jesus.*

In fact, Jesus then goes on to explain, He came to be our refuge - and not only when times are tough, but at all times. And not only the refuge of some, but the refuge of all - even Herod, the Pharisees, Pilate, all who would have a hand at putting Him to death, sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, fishermen, persecutors - **all. O Jerusalem**, He says - and you can hear the sorrow and grief in His voice - **O Jerusalem . . . How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen**

gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!

It's hard to think of a more tender picture of the love of God for us than that. The image of the Good Shepherd is better known, but how vivid the image of a mother hen with her helpless and vulnerable chicks under her wings while hungry breasts in search of a quick and easy meal prowl about, birds of prey soar overhead, and all sorts of other dangers unknown to the chicks lurk around every corner. The only line of defense between these and the chicks is her wings. And she would give herself for the life of her chicks.

Herod wants to kill you. That may be. But satan wants to devour you, body and soul! He is the real enemy. Jesus wants only to protect with the wings of His Word and Sacraments, that satan's false and deceptive words, that sin's shallow and fleeting pleasures, and that the world's vain and empty promises and ways not devour us and our faith. That we be safe in Him. That's why the prophets like Jeremiah warned the people, that's why the apostles took this message of Jesus far and wide, and that's why Jesus Himself would spread His wings, His arms, on the cross - that we find shelter and refuge and protection under them.

For as we prayed earlier (Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent): *O God You see that of ourselves we have no strength. [We're like helpless and vulnerable chicks when compared to the strength and cunning of the prince of this world!] By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul.*

But then we hear those sad words: ***and you would not.*** Jesus wants only to love and protect, to forgive and to save, but many will not have it. They leave the wings of Christ to indulge in the pleasures of sin without regard to its dangers or consequences, exposing themselves to the ravenous appetite of satan, and to face death on their own. Chicks who do so stand *little* chance of survival, though maybe they'll get lucky. For us, on our own, there is no chance.

Yes, us too. For it's not only those who reject Christ in a *big* way - Pharisees, unbelievers, atheists, followers of false gods - who leave the protection of Christ's wings. It's us too. Oh, not when satan is bearing his teeth and circling overhead, certainly. But he rarely does that. No rather when he is hiding, and you think it safe. Safe to go it on your own for a while, to indulge for a while, to explore for a while. And if you get away with it for a while, the farther you wander, the longer you stay. And many, before they know it, wind up in the long, strong talons of satan.

What is it for you? What tempts you? Maybe to go after that pleasure that seems harmless. Maybe to pursue someone in anger for revenge. Maybe you're *too busy* to stay. Maybe those wings seem too confining and you want some freedom. Maybe

you have a problem with some of the others under the wings with you. Maybe you pridefully think you're mature enough or strong enough now. Maybe these wings just seem silly, or old fashioned, or you just don't like 'em. *What else? How else does satan lure you out?*

The call of the season of Lent is to return. Return to the Lord your God. Repent and again take refuge under the wings of His Word and forgiveness. The wings that our Lord spread over you when you were baptized, as we rejoice has happened today to little Robert Jordan. This littlest of chicks given the gifts of faith and forgiveness, life and salvation, and gathered by our Lord to Himself. As He grows, He'll learn about that, this gift given to Him. He'll learn about the love of His Saviour who put Himself between the foe and Robert and gave His life for Him. He'll need to repent and return, just as we, and His Saviour will always be here for Him, calling Him back and reaching out with His wings.

And what a wonderful name he has been given: *Robert Jordan*. A constant reminder to him that our Lord who came to the Jordan to be baptized for him, has brought the Jordan here to him and baptized him, given Robert His Spirit, and said to him: *you are my son, with you I am well pleased.*

And that baptizing, that calling, that reaching out, our Lord does through those men he places into the office of the Holy Ministry, which today our friend George takes leave of us to begin his studies for service in this way. It is not *only* through pastors that our Lord does this, but pastors are those our Lord specially calls and sends and places into congregations to specifically do these very things as His representatives, in His stead and by His command. To care for His flock. Undershepherds of the Good Shepherd.

I will tell you now, George: you will never have a harder job, and you will never have a more joyful job. Speaking God's Word will sometimes get you in trouble, as it did Jeremiah. Calling people to repentance and preaching against sin has never been popular or well received. They wanted him dead as they wanted Jesus dead, and Jesus said that will happen *today* as well. And you'll be tempted, and you'll fail; you'll not always preach and teach what you should; you'll take an easier way out. It happens to all pastors. It is one of the ways we pastors sometimes leave the wings and need to repent and return.

But you'll also have days like today, when you hold a little one in your arms and pour over his head the Word and water of life. You'll see the Word at work, in big ways and small. You'll shed tears, like Jesus, over those who would not. Those who as Paul described them: ***Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.*** But you'll absolve many too. And then also every Sunday you'll place into the mouths of your flock the Body

and Blood of their Saviour. And you'll say to each and every one: **for you**. His Body and Blood for you. His forgiveness for you. His life for you. To keep you as we wait for the second coming of our **Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body**. And you'll bury some of those sheep, but confident that their **citizenship is in heaven**, and that they will be transformed on the last day.

For the Lord will never forsake His own. To those who would not, Jesus declares that **your house is forsaken**, which is not His doing but theirs. But the Lord's house is never forsaken. For in the Lord's house is His promised presence, His promised forgiveness, His promised life. So as we gather here today in repentance and faith, gathered under the wings of our Saviour, and singing **blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord**, we receive Him who comes for us - who came first to lay down His life on the cross, and who comes now to give that life to you, using such simple things like water and words and bread and wine to do so.

He will not leave you or forsake you. That's a promise we need, those of us who have no strength. That a promise we need, those of us so prone to wander. That's a promise we need, and a promise we have! A promise sealed with the blood of the Lamb of God, who finished His course from death to life, to give you a course from death to life. To be your refuge and protection now, and your joy forever.

So God bless you Robert, as we welcome you this day!
God bless you George, as we bid you farewell and godspeed this day.
And God bless us all, as we come now and receive Him who comes for us.
Yes, for truly **blessed is He/he who comes in the name of the Lord!**

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.