

21 February 2016  
Lent 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Lord Who Loves YOU with All HIS Heart”  
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.

***O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!***

When you read through the Scriptures, the thing that jumps out at you is how utterly consistent everything is. How consistently rebellious and sinful we people are, and how consistently long-suffering and loving God is.

Exhibit A are the prophets God sends to His people . . . and sends and sends and sends. Not just a few. He is constantly sending them, calling His people to repent of their way and turn back to Him. Men like Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, and more. And what do His people do? It's not just that they don't listen - that's bad enough. ut they heap sin upon sin - they stone the prophets God sends. Like we heard about Jeremiah today - don't like the message? Kill the messenger.

And when they act that way, they are acting as those described by Paul - those who ***walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.*** Yet their loving God wants them back. He won't give up. He won't give in.

But it's worth asking: *why were the people like that?* Why wouldn't they listen to God and His prophets? Well, there are a couple of reasons, I think. **First of all**, because they weren't the only prophets in town. There were false ones, too. Luther is reported to have said: *Whenever God builds a church, the devil builds a chapel right next door.* Perhaps we could modify that a bit here to say: *Whenever God sends a prophet, the devil sends one to contradict him.* And what the false prophets say is easier on the ear. So, for example, in Jeremiah's time. Jeremiah said: repent! The false prophets said: you're fine! Jeremiah said: destruction is coming! The false prophets said: you're God's people! He'll take care of you. Don't worry. *Who would you rather listen to?*

And so it continues today. For every pastor or preacher who speaks God's Word, there is at least one to contradict him, saying: *That sin is no sin. You don't need to repent. You're doing fine. God loves you. Relax. Peace. Don't worry, be happy.* And we'd rather listen to that too. I know I would! It's easier on the ear and easier for the life. I don't have to repent. I don't have to resist temptation. I don't have to turn from my sinful ways. I can just keep on, secure in my sin, doing whatever I want . . .

*But do we really want a God like that?* Well, yes! As I just said, part of us does! The sinner in us. Just like when we're children we want parents who will let us eat whatever we want and do whatever we want and be free from any kinds of rules or chores or responsibilities. And we envy the kids who have parents like that . . . But loving parents make their kids eat vegetables, so they'll be healthy. Loving parents teach their children so they'll be safe. Loving parents discipline their children to know right from wrong, what is good from what is not. And if loving parents, how much more a loving God?

**The second reason** the people wouldn't listen to God's prophets, I think, is because they had a short memory. When things were going well, they forgot about God and took Him for granted. When things were falling apart, they doubted His love and care and thought He had forgotten about them. And at both times, the last thing you want is a prophet coming around, telling you to repent! When things are going well you don't think you need to, and when things are falling apart you don't want to. And it's easy to stay away from church at *both* times, isn't it? Rejoicing, relaxing, in our good fortune or wallowing, despairing, in our trouble. *Go away, Jeremiah. Go away, God. Leave me alone . . .*

That's what the Pharisees were telling Jesus, today. Go away. Leave us alone. Herod wants to kill you, you know. Don't cause trouble. Things were fine till you came around. Go away, Jesus. Go away.

*But what kind of God do you want?* One who will leave you alone, or one who will save you?

Last week we heard of our God who came to fight Satan for us and win. Jesus fighting in the wilderness. We like that. *Ooh-rah!*

But today the readings cut a bit closer to home, with a God who didn't just come to save us from Satan, **but who came to save us from ourselves**; from our own sinful nature, our rebellious inclinations, our destructive desires. Which is a bit less comfortable . . . to admit: *those chicks, the brood that would not stay under the hen's wings?* That's not just Israel. That's not just the Pharisees. That's me. I don't want to repent. I don't want to give up those sins I like. I don't want God's discipline. I don't want to hear that I'm thinking wrong, doing wrong, speaking wrong, desiring wrong. I like those false prophets out there, who promise the world and say my sin isn't sin and I'm doing just fine . . . *But is it true?* There's a lot riding on the answer.

So what did Jesus say? What was His answer? *Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.'*

Or in other words, He's not going away. He going to finish His course, which ends at the cross. He's going to finish His course, which on the third day ends in His resurrection. He's going to fulfill the Scriptures and what all the prophets, like Jeremiah, talked about. He's going to be that God who loves us enough to do what is best for us - even when that means laying down His life for us. Many parents do that for their children, giving up sleep, riches, time, energy, and much more. *And if loving parents, how much more a loving God?*

So no, Pharisees. Jesus isn't going away. **Because He didn't come to save His own skin; He came to save yours.** He didn't come to avoid sin and death, but to face it head on and defeat it. The sin and death not just *in the world*, but in you. To save you. To call us back under His wings when we stray. To cover us when danger is near. To comfort us when doubts and fears arise. To be our refuge at all times. Or, as we pray in one of our prayers, *in all time of our tribulation, and in all time of our prosperity.* He came to be the God not that we may want, but that we need. The God who makes us not citizens of hell but of heaven, *who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.* Our sinful, dying body, to be like His sinless, resurrected body.

*Isn't that the kind of God worth having?*

And it is a transformation that begins now. Though it will not be completed until the Last Day, when our bodies rise like His, sinless and perfected - we are not just stuck waiting. He begins now. His cross, His death and resurrection, working in you, producing fruit. His **Word** calling you to repentance and teaching you the truth. His **Absolution** comforting you when you are struck down and terrified by your sin. His **Baptism** your refuge when satan tries to convince you that you're no child of God, that you're not worth anything, that God doesn't care. His **Body and Blood** feeding your body and blood, His life giving you life, to strengthen and preserve you through the trials and struggles, as well as the deceits and pleasures, of this life. *He is not going away.*

And we will sing that truth again in just a moment. We will sing the words that Jesus said at the end of the reading today, when He said: *you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'* We'll sing that as part of the communion liturgy . . . our confession that He has not gone away, but is here for us. To gather this brood called Saint Athanasius under His wings. That with His forgiveness, we be protected.

The troubles will still come. Satan will not rest. And they may be quite heavy and difficult at times. He is vicious. But the refuge of our Saviour is not of a trouble-free life, but the confidence of knowing that we are safe and secure in the midst of such troubles. That not sin, satan, death, hell or *anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus* (Rom 8:38-39). He has defeated them all, for you.

So the hymn we just sang, right before the sermon: *Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart* (LSB #708) . . . I wish I could say that was true for me. Oh, it is of the saint in me. He loves God with all his heart. But not that old sinner in me. That old pleasure-seeking, God-doubting, world-loving sinner in me, whose head keeps popping up and leading me astray; who's like the *Whack-a-Mole* arcade game and needs God's Law to keep hammering it down.

So this is my comfort: NOT that I love God with all MY heart, **but that HE loves ME with all HIS heart**. And you. So He calls you to repentance. He calls you to His cross, to see that love, there. He calls you to His altar now, to receive it. And He will call you home on the Last Day, to glory in it - in Him - forever. So that no matter what hand you're dealt, no matter what troubles or pleasures come, no matter what your heart tells you - you have something more sure. A promise and a Saviour. Who will not back down and not go away. Who will *finish His course* for you. That the joy of His third day be the joy and confidence of your *everyday*.

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