

6 August 2023  
Pentecost 10  
Baptism of Lilian Joy Reeder  
Confirmation of Ben Fox

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“This Is Why . . .”  
Text: Matthew 14:13-21

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

Jesus had just gotten the news. His cousin, John, was dead. Brutally murdered. Beheaded by King Herod. Even though it wasn't a surprise, He wanted some time away. Like we would. For Jesus was a man just like us. Yes, also true God, but not using His divine prerogative for Himself. He lived and experienced life as we do. In all its sadness, in all its brutality, with all the trials and difficulties sin brought into the world. So at this news about His cousin, John, He is not unaffected. He wept when His friend Lazarus died. So here He goes to a desolate place by Himself. This is not right. Death is not right.

But this is exactly why He came. Because sin has made our world into something it was never intended to be, twisting a good and perfect creation into a place of brutality, of hatred, of the abuse of power, of death. From Abel falling at the hand of his own brother, to the beheading of John, to the murders in our streets today. And it's not getting better. You know this heartache. From the sins committed against your loved ones, the sins committed against you, and the ways you've hurt others. Don't you wish you could just sometimes get away?

But this news, while sad, is not surprising to Jesus. This is the way of it with prophets, true prophets. Which prophet in the Old Testament did the people not want to kill? You will not find one. Then and now, people don't like their sins revealed and being told to repent. So kill the messenger. What John preached to King Herod is the same thing he preached to all the others who came to him, it's just that Herod had the power to do something about it. Preach the truth to power, and you lose your head.

John knew that. But to this he was called. To preach the truth - not only of our sin, but of our Saviour. He knew the one coming after him was the promised Messiah. The one who would save this twisted world. So John preached, because he knew that while Herod could take his freedom and his head, he could not take his life. That was safe. In the hands of his God. The Saviour and Redeemer he preached.

So Jesus was not surprised, but also not unaffected. So He goes to a desolate place by

Himself. But He cannot get away. The crowds are there waiting for Him. This, too, affects Jesus. Because what happened to John is also happening *to them*. They are being ravaged by sin, sickness, disease, death; poverty, hatred, fighting, hunger. And Jesus has compassion on them. He knows what it was like in the beginning, He sees how it is now, and He grieves. For them. This is exactly why He came. For them. For this. So He heals their sick. He loves them.

But then it gets late. The sun is going down. Send them home, Jesus, His disciples say. Let them get something to eat. But this, too, is because of sin. In the Garden, there was food all around. You couldn't hardly turn around without bumping into a fruit or vegetable! But now . . . ***this is a desolate place***. Jesus can't send them away without food; without overcoming the desolation, even if only for one day, one meal. ***You give them something to eat***, He tells His disciples. Perhaps that's a little like me telling you to fix the problems in Washington! *What? What can we do? We can't fix that!* And the disciples have only five loaves and two fish. But that is enough. *More than enough* for Jesus. He feeds them all, and with plenty more for His disciples.

This is what Jesus came to do. Come into a world we have desolated with sin and death, and save it. Save us. Like Abel, He would die at the hands of His brothers. He would not be beheaded by John, but He would wear a mocking crown of thorns on His head while being crucified. **He would die a death He did not deserve, so we could live a life we do not deserve**. He would die our death with us, that rising from the dead, we could live His life with Him. John knew that and so preached it. Jesus knew that and so did all that He did. And by grace, you know that, and that's why you're here. In this world, desolated with sin and death, you have come to this place as an oasis. To be with Jesus. To receive His forgiveness in a world of sin. To receive His life in a world of death and decay. To hear His Word of truth in a world of lies. And to be fed by Him with food even more miraculous than that day in the wilderness - with His own true Body and Blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin.

And as the disciples tried to get Jesus to send the crowds away, so satan has done his best to keep you from being here; to keep you from being with Jesus. Problems you have to deal with, pleasures that distract, sins that make you feel unworthy, busyness, weariness, whatever it takes for you in your situation. He uses the lies of the world that say the Word of God is unreliable and not true; believe us instead. And seek the approval of the world - your life will be easier! And maybe that's true. But it will no longer be eternal. John knew that. Jesus knew that. You know it, too. That's why you're here, like the crowds that met Jesus that day. It's not easy. The allures of the world and sin are powerful. We fall and fail. But here is Jesus to forgive and feed and save.

That's why satan tries so hard to keep you from here, and why He hates not only what we do here every Sunday, but especially today! **A baptism!** Taking a child away from him and making her a child of God! It's like poking him in the eye with a stick. He will not

take this lightly. Expect to be attacked Lilian. Expect to be attacked Marcus and Bryana. Satan hates you. He will rage against you. He wants you dead. He wants you desolate in sin. This is why the whole congregation stood and confessed the Creed with you, Lilian! To stand with you, to stand behind you, against such a fearsome foe.

**And a confirmation, too!** Expect to be attacked Ben. Confessing the faith of the triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the creator, redeemer, and sanctifier, the Lord and giver of life, our Saviour, is no small thing. Satan hates this, too! To confess that Jesus came to undo all the work of satan. To confess that Jesus died on the cross for *every* sin of *every* person who *ever* lived, and so *there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1). So satan will try to convince you there is, condemnation. That you are not good enough, you're too sinful, too far gone. Hopeless. But that lie was put to death with the empty tomb. *The wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23), and so if death has been conquered and overcome, so has sin. Your sin. All sin.

So little Lilian was today baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection. She has received the gifts of life and salvation, the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins. And Ben will confess that faith given to him and the gifts given to him in his baptism. And he will be fed by Jesus in the midst of this desolate world, with not five loaves and two fish, but with the ONE Body and Blood of Jesus. And those gifts we, too, have received and will receive. From the hand of our good and gracious Saviour.

For this is why He came. This is *exactly* why Jesus came. To lay down His life for you. To take up His life for you. To baptize you. To absolve you. To comfort you. To feed you. To bless you. And one day, to come again for you. And on that day, there will again be a great crowd, but this time *a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages* (Revelation 7:9). And there will be another great feast, the wedding feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. And there will be no going home, for we will be home.

So Lilian, welcome. Ben, welcome. We're glad you're here. But Jesus even more. So rejoice in Him, who comes for you, who is here for you, and who *rejoices* in you.

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.