

28 February 2010  
Lent 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Comfortable or Repentant?”

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

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

There is always great danger that as Christians, we will grow too comfortable in this world and life. That we will be satisfied with the status quo. That we will forget that, as St. Paul said, ***our citizenship is in heaven.***

It's not that the things of this world and life are bad - they're not. God created everything good, and everything from His hand is good. And God wants us to enjoy what He has made for us and given to us: our families and friends, our work and possessions, our homes and lives. It is good to receive these gifts from the Lord with thanksgiving, and to care for them. But not to cling too tightly to them, but always remember that who we are, what we have, and what we are given to do, is all gift from our Father in heaven.

When we forget that, you see, is sin. Sin which forgets the Giver, and clings to the gifts. And clinging to the gifts, sin that then looks to the gifts, the things of this world and life, for refuge and strength, for meaning and purpose, for all that I need. And looking to the gifts, sin that then forgets where our true refuge and help is, and becomes self-reliant. And self-reliant, sin that then becomes self-seeking and self-centered, so that when the call to repentance comes, it is either rejected, or something that we find very, very hard to do.

This was the problem with the people in Jeremiah's day. They were clinging to Jerusalem, to the land, and to the Temple, instead of to the One who gave them these things. And so when Jeremiah prophesied to them that unless they repent and return to the Giver, ***“This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant,”*** they could not stand it. They were too comfortable the way they were.

That was the problem with the people in Paul's day, who, as Paul said, ***made their god their belly*** and ***set their mind on earthly things.*** And so Paul's words and preaching fell on deaf ears. They were too comfortable the way they were.

And that was the problem with Herod and the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They were so

comfortable in their religion and their religious life and the way things were, that when *God Himself* came to them in flesh and blood, ***casting out demons and performing cures***, and calling people to repent and return, they would not listen, but sought His life.

Which brings us, yes, to you and me and our day. Are you too comfortable in this world and life? Are you clinging too tightly to the gifts instead of the Giver? Are you unwilling to let them go? Have you forgotten where your true citizenship is - that by virtue of your Baptism, you are a citizen of heaven?

It is amazing, isn't it? How comfortable and forgetful we can become, and so quickly! For look at where we are so comfortable - a culture that embraces death and sees it as a solution; that sees alternative lifestyles not only as okay, but to be promoted; that seeks to remove Jesus from all public discourse; that glories in shameful things, while shaming those who speak of glorious things.

And are we comfortable with ourselves? We who like to point out the sin in others, but ignore the sin in ourselves - not wanting to repent and let go of the sin we like and have grown comfortable with. Or, the equally dangerous and opposite error of being so wrapped up in our sin and shame that we become perversely proud of being worse than others - and so not wanting to repent and let go. Are our pews too padded and our hearts too hard? When maybe it should be the other way around . . .

Well, what is Jesus' response to all this? He cries out: ***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! Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'***"

You couldn't blame Jesus if He just gave up. And then and on us. If He had just thrown His hands up and said: ***"Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me again!"*** That's it.

*But He didn't say that.* Instead, He said: ***"And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'***" That day came as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. When He rode into Jerusalem to become one of those prophets killed there. When He rode into Jerusalem, throwing His hands up - but not to give up on us, but throwing them up on the cross to save us. Spreading them out on the cross, that we might take refuge under them as under His wings.

For this is why He came - not to condemn us, but to save us. And so He hangs there willingly, He hangs there lovingly, and He hangs there calling us back. Not to die, but to live. For that is why He died - that we may live. That after laying down his life, He take it up again, to crush the power of sin and death in His resurrection, and to now give that victory and life to you and me. The victory and life that comes with the forgiveness of our sins. To work in our hearts all that is needed, that we may find our life in Him.

For only in Him is life. Life that transcends the things of this world. Life in good times and in bad times, in times of plenty or times of need, whether you are young or old.

That is the life that enabled **Jeremiah** to say to those who rejected him, ***“Do with me as seems good and right to you,”*** for he knew they could kill him, but they could not take his life.

That is the life that enabled **Paul** to rejoice even while he sat languishing in prison. For they could lock him up, but they could not take his life.

And that is the life given to **you and me**, as we come to the altar this day, singing, ***Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!***” and so taking refuge under the arms of our Saviour. Taking refuge in His body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. Taking refuge in His love, which is always here for you.

And safe under the wings of our Saviour, we see the things of this world and life for what they are: *gifts*. They are what is given, they cannot give us what we want and need. And so faith clings not to them, but to our Saviour.

That when life gets tough - like it is for the people of Chile and Haiti, like it is for many of you - that we have a refuge, and life, and hope, in Him.

That when the things of this world and life get taken away from us - when family and friends die, when the economy tanks, when the bubbles of our pride and self-sufficiency are popped - that we have a refuge, and life, and hope, in Him.

That when we are burdened by our sin, and realize that we have become too comfortable, and when fear and forgetfulness get the better of us - that we have a refuge, and life, and hope, in Him.

For still He is calling to us. Sending His prophets, apostles, and pastors to call us to repentance, to point us to His wings, and to give us His forgiveness and life. The life that cannot be taken away.

As so as we hear in the Gradual all through this season of Lent - we **come, [and] fix our eyes on Jesus**. On Jesus on the cross, *and* on Jesus in our neighbor. That in faith toward Him and love toward one another, we live as citizens of heaven. Not clinging, but giving. Not demanding, but loving. Not begrudging, but forgiving. Not boasting, but praying. That we not be comfortable and satisfied with the status quo, but **standing firm in the Lord** under the refuge of His wings, we repent, take up our cross and follow Him now, until one day we rest in the comfort of our heavenly home.

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.