

7 March 2004  
Lent 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Risky Business”

Text: Luke 13:31-35 (Jeremiah 26:8-15)

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!”*** What sadness is in Jesus’ voice as He speaks those words. He is a Saviour rejected. He wanted to save, rescue, and protect His people; from sin, death, and devil; but they would not have it. They weren’t interested. Why? Because it would involve the one thing they did not want to do: repent.

For you see, **repentance is risky business**. It means that I have to admit that I am not the person I think I am. It means that I have to admit that I am not the person I want to be. It means that I have to admit that I am under another authority – one outside of me. It means that I have to admit that what someone else says about me is true. All of those things are very hard for all of us to do. Whether you lived in Jesus’ day, or today.

Because our world tells us that perhaps the worst thing you can do is accept someone else’s opinion about who you are. You create your own truth, we are told. Who you are is right for you. Others do not have the right to impose their morals, or their beliefs, upon you. Your decisions are right for you. And accepting someone else’s opinion about who you are is tantamount to treason! It is a betrayal of yourself and of everything mankind has striven so hard and so long to achieve!

And so if someone tells says you are a sinner, or that what you’re doing is wrong, don’t believe it! That might be their truth, but it doesn’t have to be yours. If someone tells you you’re not good enough, don’t believe it! That might be their opinion, but it doesn’t have to be yours. If someone tries to tell you *anything*, be skeptical. Don’t allow them to impose their thoughts and teachings upon you. Who you are is who you want to be. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Yet at the same time as this attitude reigns in our world – this individuality, this self-rule, this so-called freedom – have you noticed? We still try to get others to agree with our

choices and accept who we are. Their opinion does matter. We want affirmation of our choices, and to feel good about ourselves. . . . And so what we have really done is not freed ourselves – we have simply exchanged one authority for another. We have exchanged timeless truths for trends and fads and momentary pleasures.

And so enslaved to the moment, credit card debt is at an all-time and staggering high. Churches are constantly changing and “updating” their teachings, and their worship, and their images, to please those who come by and “shop.” And we no longer know who we are. Knowledge of history is gone. It may be funny to hear that people don’t know who the president of the United States is, when Jay Leno asks them on the street, but it is also extremely sad. I know who the American Idol is, though.

We have, as a society, made a great shift – from the objective to the subjective. Or in other words, what matters is not outside of me, the objective – what matters is only what is inside of me. What matters is not what others think, but what I think. What matters is not what others need, but what I need. What matters is not truth, but happiness. That is, after all, what America is all about isn’t it? “*Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness!*”

And with such an attitude, there is no room for repentance. There is no room for a Saviour. For I am accountable to no one but myself.

But this attitude, as modern as it sounds, is also quite ancient. This *defiance* not only happens today, it also happened with the prophet Jeremiah, and as we heard, with Jesus.

So when a prophet like Jeremiah comes along and challenges the status quo, he is met with cries of indignation and outrage. What gives Jeremiah the right to say we’re not good enough? What gives him the right to call us to repentance? What gives him the right to say God is displeased with us? And why should we listen to him? We have our own prophets and priests over here who will tell us what we want to hear. Yes, we will listen to them! . . . And so also when Jesus came along – he is met with rejection, and cries of indignation and outrage. Who are you, Jesus, to say that you know the truth and we don’t? Who are you to tell us we’re not good enough? What gives you the right to call us to repentance? Who are you to come in here and upset everything? . . . And we say these kinds of things, too. To our parents, to our friends, to God. You can’t tell me! I’ll listen to these others, who will tell me what I *want* to hear. . . . Because a lot of the time, we’re just not interested in the truth – happiness is good enough. Just give me a couple of friends, a dog, and a TV, and life is good. . . . But is that *really* what life is all about?

And so **repentance is risky business**. Because it means I don’t know everything. It

means I'm not good enough. It means there is an authority outside of *me*. It means there is truth. It means giving up control. It means that I am dependent on someone else. It means I need something that I cannot do for myself; that I cannot get for myself. It means that I am not self-sufficient. It means that I have been going in the wrong direction. It means that there is something bigger and more important than me. It means that I am a sinner.

And that's **risky business!** All of those things are very hard to say. It's embarrassing. It's humiliating. It's humbling. And so many people refuse. They can't take that leap. It's simply too scary. And it is – **unless** we know into whose arms we are falling. **Unless** we know who is the One in authority over us. **Unless** we know His promises to those who repent and come to Him.

For to admit our weakness and failure *to the world* means that we are ridiculed and used and taken advantage of. It means to be looked down upon and to be seen as something less than the world thinks we should be. And so we stiffen up and put up a front to protect ourselves. To survive. It's dog-eat-dog out there!

But not in here! Not before your Saviour. For to admit our weakness and failure here – **to repent** – means not ridicule, or humiliation, or shame, but mercy, and care, and forgiveness. *It means to be under the wings of our Saviour* – under His love and protection. For here, the One in authority over us is not a treacherous tyrant, but a loving Father. Here, the One in whose arms we fall is not looking to use us or take advantage of us, but care for us and lay down His life for us. He asks us to repent not to shame us, but to forgive us. He teaches us the truth not to enslave us, but to set us free. To free us from the enslavements of the world, and the constant battles we have to fight to stay up with the world.

And so as we repent, the arms and hands into which we are here falling are arms and hands which know the pain of nails. Which know the pain of rejection. Which know the suffering and struggle. Which know the road that we are on – the road to death and destruction. And so the arms that we here fall into are arms of rescue. Arms of forgiveness. Here is the voice which doesn't just tell us what we want to hear, but what we need to hear. Here are hands which don't just give us what we want, but what we need. Here is the One who doesn't demand that we sacrifice ourselves for Him, but who sacrifices Himself for us. Who is here for us. Always here for us. And not simply in some spiritual, mystical way, but in flesh and blood. That we can taste and touch and feel. Giving us Himself. Giving us His life. Giving us His forgiveness. Take and eat.

And in repentance, acknowledging our weakness and failure and need, we receive these

gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, and we are freed. Freed from this world and its life-devouring demands, and freed to live. Freed to live, for in receiving these gifts, you find that you have received much more than you were seeking. You receive something much more than “happiness” – happiness which is so fleeting and is here today and gone tomorrow; with friends that come and go; with broken promises and empty pleasures. No, here, in the freedom of Christ, and His love and forgiveness, His life laid down on the cross, but taken up in the resurrection, is contentment. And with contentment, joy. And that is something quite different than happiness. For happiness is just the opposite of sadness – but joy is much deeper than that. For you can be joyful and happy at the same time, but you can also be joyful and sad at the same time. You can be joyful in plenty or joyful in need. Joyful in trouble or joyful in triumph. Because our joy is not grounded in us, in what we think, or in our *emotions* – it is grounded in the One outside of us. In Christ. And therefore it cannot be taken from us. This world and its things may come and go. Our truths and what is important to us change. But the joy of Christ, the joy of His life and forgiveness, the joy of His promises and freedom, lasts forever.

And who do we see that joy in? The examples in Scripture are plentiful. The Samaritan woman at the well, the lepers that are cleansed, the tax collectors that are accepted, little Zaccheus, the woman caught in adultery saved from stoning, the blind who are given their sight, the paralyzed who walk, the Centurion whose son was raised from the dead. And most of all, we see it in Jesus. Or as we heard in the Gradual, ***“Oh, come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”***

This is the joy that Jeremiah is calling us to. This is the joy that Jesus is calling us to. And as we repent, we receive this joy in the freedom and forgiveness of our sins. And if repentance is risky business, far more risky is to not repent. For in repentance, we receive much more than we give up. We receive all that we were looking for.

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.