

Sermon for The Fifth Sunday in Lent

Date: March 21, 2021

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Jeremiah 31:31–34

Epistle Reading: Hebrews 5:1-10

Gospel Reading: Mark 10:32-45



Sermon Text: Isaiah 11:10-16

Sermon Title: An Ecumenical Exodus

Introit: Psalm 116:1-4,8; Antiphon: Psalm 43:1

Hymns:

LSB 433 – Glory Be to Jesus

LSB 700 – Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

LSB 435 – Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain

Liturgy:

Divine Service I, p. 151



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Text: Jeremiah 31:31–34

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

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Pronunciation for difficult words are contained in { }

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sometimes it sounds like God has bitten off more than He can chew; and promises more than He can deliver. Now of course we know God is the Almighty and can do whatever He wants, but theory is theory and life is life, and sometimes theories and promises don't seem much good in life. Especially when you're in exile, when nothing seems to be going right, and it seems as if you're in over your head. Then what?

Well then, we remember that God's promises are never just words. They are concrete realities. His promises are not just words that may or may not come true. They are, in fact, declarations of the truth. They are the most sure and certain thing we can know.

So, at Jericho, when God promised that voices alone would topple walls that every great military planner of the time said were impenetrable. So it was in the wilderness, when against all common sense, God promised that by gazing at a bronze snake on a poll they would be cured of the venom. So it was when God promised Lot at Sodom that the city was going to be reduced to a pile of ashes by the morning. So it was with Abraham and Sarah, when God promised that this elderly couple was going to have a baby. How can this be?

We may shake our heads and like Sarah and laugh in doubt, but God always has the last laugh. The walls came down. The people were cured. Sodom was incinerated, and a child of promise was born. A child through whom God would keep His promise to bless all the nations of the earth. God does what He says.

So it is with the promise we heard today from the prophet Jeremiah. The promise of the greatest return from exile of all. The promise that Abraham's descendants through Isaac, whose numbers are more numerous than the sands on the seashore and the stars in the sky, who are scattered throughout the world, would be gathered together once more.

Sure, God had brought His people out of Egypt, but this time God will extend His hand to recover the remnant of His people not only from Egypt, but from every corner of the world. The prophet Isaiah states:

[God] will raise a [banner] for the nations, and will assemble the banished of Israel... from the four corners of the earth.

No one is excluded, in this greatest exodus of all. If you think God's promises were great up to now, you ain't seen nothin' yet!

It does seem impossible, doesn't it? Look at how fractured our world is today. Look at all the hostility, that span history. Look at all the hatred and envy, the jealousy and harassment, the wars and bloodshed. All in the name of power, in the name of progress. Sometimes such sin, even in the name of God. Look at the problems and struggles, the trouble and turmoil. How could all these enemies be overcome? We all might reflect a little bit of Sarah, laughing, and doubting God?

Like I said before, God's promises are never just words. They are always concrete realities. About 600 years after Jeremiah spoke these words, God set them into motion. He did it in what some might perceive to be a laughable way. When in king David's hometown, a baby was born and laid in a feed trough. This baby was unlike all others. Here was God in the flesh, come to reign over not a geographic nation, but a nation whose citizens were scattered over the four corners of the earth. As He Himself proclaimed, when He is lifted up on the cross, He will draw all people to Himself.¹ He will be a shepherd not only over the flock of Israel, but the flock of all nations, so there will be one flock and one shepherd.² He sends out His apostles into all the world, to make disciples of all nations, by baptizing and teaching.³

What God promises, He does. His Word is fact. His Word is truth. So for all people, for all the world, the Seed of Abraham undergoes His own tortured exodus from Jerusalem, up the mount called Golgotha, and onto the tree of the knowledge that God loves you. They drive steel through His royal flesh and heap abuse upon Him, until finally the breath that breathed life into Adam now breathes His last. ... and the demons laugh. The way, the truth and the Life is a corpse. The Word is silent.

But then comes laughter! The day Abraham saw and rejoiced; the day of Isaiah's prophesy; the day of Jeremiah's prophesy; the day when Jesus walks out of that tomb, making Jericho, Sodom, the wilderness, and all the rest look like child's play. Here is the true and final exodus, the toppling of the prince of this world, the end of hostilities between God and us. The captivity of captivity, and the death of death. The un-accomplishable is accomplished

A promise fulfilled. To give life to you who are dead. To give breath to you who are breathless. To give hope to you who are hopeless. To give forgiveness to you who are in exile in sin, and to thus bring you home.

1 John 12:32

2 John 10:16

3 Matthew 28:20

So now, God says, laugh! Laugh it up! Laugh, but not in doubt, in joy; not in fear, in confidence; not in sin, but in forgiveness, life and salvation. Now is fulfilled all that the prophets foretold. Lift up your eyes and see all the nations turned upside down; see spilling out of them men and women, boys and girls, every color of the rainbow, streaming to Jesus. From Assyria to America, from Egypt to Japan, indeed from the four corners of the earth. Those once fettered in sin are freed in Jesus.

In His own bloodied exodus from Jerusalem, the Son of God paved the way for all of you, for the whole world, to enter the heavenly Jerusalem, new Jerusalem, the Church of the living God. Before Him, all our enemies run. The fear they wanted to put in you has now been put on them. It was the devil who bit off more than he could chew, when he convinced Adam and Eve to start eating from the wrong tree.

No matter who you are, or what you've done; no matter the mud and muck of life you're feel you stuck in right now, you are a part of this exodus. Say to sin and death, shame and regret, and failure, "Begone! You have no power, no claim, over this child of God. You have been drowned in the sea of Holy Baptism. You have been buried and banished to the grave. It is finished. Jesus said so.

His Word is fact. His Word it is truth. The exodus of all exoduses has been accomplished by the King of kings, and Lord of lords. All this to bring you into the Holy of Holies. Into the very presence of God. Without fail, Jesus has done it. He has done it for you. Do not fear, do not doubt. He who sits in the heavens, at the Father's right hand, laughs;⁴ and so can you. He has kept His promise. The last laugh is His.

Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**



4 Psalm 2:4