

"Slaying the Red Lizard" -- Psalm 32:3-5

The Sixth Sunday of Easter -- May 17, 1998
The Confirmation of
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Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Emmett, Idaho
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O LORD, our Creator, Redeemer and Comforter, as we come together to worship You in spirit and in truth, we humbly pray that You may open our hearts to the preaching of Your Word, so that we may repent of our sins, believe in Jesus Christ as our only Savior, and grow in grace and holiness. Hear us for His sake. Amen.

Dear Angie, Nicole, Adrian, Andrew, Tyler, and Jon, your parents, sponsors, friends, and members of the Family of God here at Our Redeemer:

Welcome! Welcome to this special day here at Our Redeemer. It is, as you know, Confirmation Sunday. It is a day we have longed to behold and we have anticipated its arrival. I have looked forward to today, and I know that you young people and your parents have as well. Some of you have been attended confirmation class for three years, several of you for a couple years, and one of you for four years. On this special day, you will be confirming the faith proclaimed on the day when you were baptized.

That you might always remember the Good News of God's love for you in Christ Jesus your crucified and risen Savior, and follow in the Way that He would have you go, I direct your attention to Psalm 32. This is a psalm written by King David. It tells of the real struggle that he had with sin, the weight of God's Law that was crushing him, and the saving, life-giving, wonderful Gospel message of the Lord God's forgiveness. Please listen to the sermon text, Psalm 32, verses 3-5, doing so under the theme of ...

... Slaying the Red Lizard!

When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to Thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; then Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Once upon a time, in the land of thorns and thistles, there was a young man. Or was it a young woman? I don't really recall, but for our purposes here this morning, let's assume that it was a young woman - you know, an older girl. She was dressed in a white robe and on her shoulder was a small red lizard. The red lizard had been there from the moment the girl had life, and as the girl grew up from infancy, to being a toddler, and attending Sunday School, the red lizard on her shoulder grew bigger as well. On her confirmation day you noticed the red lizard more against the young lady's

white robe. There it was, crouching on her shoulder ... a lifelong companion though hardly a good, well-intentioned friend.

Just what does this mean? What or who is this red lizard? Well, some have called it the devil, and while the red lizard was vulnerable to and had a receptive ear to be in Satan's control, it wasn't Satan. Some thought the red lizard was a pet sin, and even though the red lizard feasted on the girl's sins, especially feeding on her pet sins, the red lizard was neither a sin nor a pet sin.

After her confirmation sermon, following her confirmation the Christian faith, when she had received the Body and Blood of her Savior Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, after the pictures were taken, when the hugs and shaking of hands were over, and after the reception in the fellowship hall, the confirmand removed the cincture, unpinned the flower, slipped the cross necklace from around her neck, removed her white confirmation robe and hung it up.

The red lizard had been pretty subdued and sleepy in the midst of all this, especially during the Lord's Supper, but as the confirmand removed the robe, the red lizard hopped from one shoulder to the other in order to remain with the young woman. (The red lizard had done this many times in the girl's life. It was not a difficult maneuver for the little red critter.) Anyway, there it rested, apparently asleep during the activities of the day; rather dormant on this great and wonderful day when the church rejoiced in her good confession made in the presence of many witnesses.

Now we should make something very clear at this point, Jon, Nicole, Adrian, Tyler, Angie, and Andrew. The young woman with the red lizard on her shoulder was not unique. In fact, all the other confirmands had red lizards on their shoulders as well. In truth, everyone in church on that Sunday had a red lizard on his or her shoulder. As they talked, ate confirmation cake, and drank punch, each person had this crimson companion on one shoulder or the other. If the truth be made further known, everyone in the entire world was adorned the very same way.

The only difference in all these people, whether they were male or female, young or old, whether king like David or slave like Onesimus, whether Christian or non-Christian, was the size and demeanor of the individual red lizards. Some of the red lizards were absolutely huge; others were rather small - some roared, snarled, spit venom, and whipped their tails back and forth in a menacing mode; others were more docile and under control.

Well anyway, back to the young woman with the red lizard on her shoulder. She was growing up and starting to think about high school and college and what she was going to do. Soon she would be going farther from home and a bit more on her own, and as the years were going by, making more and more of her own decisions. The red lizard was growing a bit bigger though the woman was not aware of it. She traveled to and fro in life and began to neglect the Lord and His Church.

Sometimes such a downfall occurs slowly while, at other times, like King David, it all happened very quickly. David lusted, became covetous and committed adultery. He lied, stole and murdered, justifying himself in the process. It seemed so right. Traveling away from God appeals to the red lizard and King David had departed from the Lord. David might well have been able to agree with the contemporary song, "You Light Up My Life" especially with the lyrics, "How can it be wrong when it feels so right?" Sin is like that and the red lizard becomes a ravenous beast weighing down heavily upon the shoulders and backs. And if the Lord permitted David to go on like that, the consequences would crush to death ... the second death.

Let's get back to the young confirmand with the red lizard on her shoulder. We find her five, ten or fifteen years later, and let's assume that she has wandered away from the Lord. That is not an invalid or unique assumption for us to make. In checking the church record of youth confirmations here at Our Redeemer, I found that in the last fourteen years there have been 55 people just like you six who have been confirmed. Only 27 have continued with an active life involving Word and Sacrament. That's half. That's sad. That's tragic.

So, let's get back to the young confirmand with the red lizard on her shoulder. We find her five, ten or fifteen years later, and she has wandered away from the Lord. She has not heard the Word of God's forgiveness in Christ for such a long time. She has instead, listened to the voice of her crimson companion. She has stayed away from the Holy Communion. The red lizard on her shoulder is now the size of a 50 pound crocodile. Its claws dig into her shoulder and cause her great pain. She is weary from packing this beast about and considers it to be a veritable pain in the neck. Her *body wasted away through her groaning all day long*. She knows that this huge red lizard is killing her but she can do nothing about it.

To add to her torment, one day she discovers another burden -- another weight upon her other shoulder. She is surprised to discover that it is the hand of God. "Ah, yes, just what we need," the red lizard prompts the young woman to say aloud. "Not only has life done us a wrong turn, but I find You, O God, now weighing me down from the other side." Or, as King David discovered and confessed, *For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer*.

Through His Word, the Lord comes to the heavily burdened woman and says, "I have suffered and died on Calvary's cross for all the sins that you have committed - for all those sins and pet sins you have been feeding your red lizard. I rose again from the dead, defeating the devil who has been encouraging you to ignore both yourself and your red lizard. I want you to have real life in Me and not the death that is now consuming you. I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly. I have come to deal with that red lizard that you have on your shoulder."

The red lizard rises to a great height and to the size of a small dragon and hisses into the ear of the young woman, "Run. Get us away from the LORD and His Word."

The Word asks the woman, "Do you want me to silence the red lizard?"

"Yes. Certainly," she replies.

"Then I will slay it," says the Word.

"Slay it! Who said anything about killing it?"

"Slaying it will silence it. It's the only way."

The woman thought and made up all sorts of reasons why this should not be done. "But the red lizard is my companion and only bothers me once and awhile."

"I must slay the red lizard."

"Maybe it's not so bad after all."

"I must slay the red lizard."

"But what about my pet sins?"

The Word replies, "I must slay the red lizard."

The woman asked, "Will it hurt me?"

"Yes, it will hurt."

The woman, now bearing an elephant-sized red lizard that was driving her into the ground, screamed, "What? I don't want you to hurt me."

"I must slay the red lizard."

"How?"

"It must be crucified."

"Crucified?! What? No way!"

The Word repeated, "I must slay the red lizard again."

"Again? You have done this before?"

The Word answered, "Many times have I slain the red lizard on your shoulder."

"Many times?"

"Yes, though not recently ... not for decades."

The woman was astonished, "When was this first done."

"In your Baptism. Search your memory and recall all those verses that you memorized when you were in Sunday School and Confirmation classes. You remember them."

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (Romans 6:3)

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24).

Then it was that the woman realized how far she had wandered from her Lord Who came and died and rose again for her -- that the penalty of all her sins had been paid for by Jesus Christ. With the hand of the Lord weighing down heavily upon one shoulder and the gigantic red lizard on the other shoulder, she cried out for deliverance as King David had done so long ago and confessed in one psalm:

I acknowledged my sin to Thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; then Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin.

The woman realized that this ferocious red lizard was, in fact, her old sinful nature and that only God could slay it. The Lord would have to slay the red lizard day after day until the day she entered into paradise and was freed from life in this world. One morning she smiled and said to herself:

"I remember. Now how did that memory work go. 'The Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.'"

Therefore, as you six young people and all the others in this room, leave this holy place and go out into the world, please know that the red lizard is on one of your shoulders, while the hand of the Lord is on the other. May you stop, daily in your Bible readings and devotions, and weekly as you come to the house of the Lord to hear His crushing Law and His comforting Gospel. For what David wrote was most certainly true for him and I pray is most certainly true for you and me.

When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to Thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; then Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin." Amen.

Note: A close reading of *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis will reveal that using a red lizard in both the sermon title and body is not an original creation of mine. I got the idea for both from a section in the Lewis book on pages 98-102 and developed the theme under the Law-Gospel structure of Psalm 32:3-5.