

"The Bats and the Belfry"

John 14:23-29

16 May Anno Domini 2004

Easter 6 -- Confirmation Day for

Jessica Bain - Tabitha Matton - Henry Russell

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the LORD our God; that is, in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

A fictitious story is told of a congregation that had trouble with bats in the belfry. They tried to get rid of the bats by tearing down the places where they stayed, but the bats came back and re-built their resting spots in the church. Then they put large stereo speakers in the building when the bats went out at night and played loud country-western music to keep them away in the morning. But alas, the bats returned to the belfry. Whatever they tried, the bats kept coming back to the church. Then they came upon the solution. They decided to confirm the bats and from the day of their confirmation, the bats left and never came back.

We laugh at that for the briefest of moments and then wonder why it's so funny; for in reality the story focuses on a sad truth that too often takes place. Young people come to the Divine Services, attend Sunday School and Catechism Class for years and then when they are confirmed, they drift away from the Church and fall away from the Lord.

Jessie, Tabitha and Henry, this is your confirmation day and we - that is, you, me, your family and your church family - have looked forward to this day for a long time. We rejoice that you three will make the good confession of the faith here in the presence of many witnesses. We hope and pray that you will continue to come to Sunday School and the Divine Services. The Lord invites you to prepare for His Supper here every week.

Therefore, this sermon on your confirmation day is preached especially to two of you three. And you quickly wonder, which two? The answer? These two ... the one who stays and the one who falls away. This you are being told beforehand, so that when it takes place, you may recall the Law and the Gospel, and believe such Word of God.

The sermon text is the Gospel Reading assigned to the Church for today. Please listen to that Holy Word of God under the theme of ...

"The Bats and the Belfry"

"If a man loves Me, he will keep My Word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our Home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My Words; and the Word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's Who sent Me. 'These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My Name, He

will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard Me say to you, "I go away, and I will come to you." If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

In this Gospel Reading, Jesus is speaking with His disciples, particularly Thomas, Philip, and Judas (not Iscariot), who had been following the Lord and listening to His teaching and learning the doctrines of the Church for nearly three years. That's about as long as you three have been in Catechism Class. After Thomas asks Jesus about the Way He was going, our Redeemer replied, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except by Me" (John 14:6). Philip asks to see the Father. Oh Philip, have you been in class so long and yet you ask a question like that! Don't you understand? Judas asks how Jesus is going to manifest Himself to them but not to the world. Yet is Jesus patient and He explains the truth concerning the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus knows where He is going in John 14. He is on the way to the cross in order to be beaten, spit upon, crucified and die for the sins of the world. Then Jesus will arise from the dead in victory over death and the devil. He will ascend into heaven and send the Holy Spirit Who proceeds from the Father and the Son. Both the humiliation and the exaltation of the Christ will be times of awful trials for the disciples. So, Jesus says to them, "And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe." He teaches them of the Law that accuses and condemns, and of the Gospel that comforts and forgives so that, after all this takes place and they have fled from Jesus and sinned horribly, they would recall God's Word. Then would the Holy Spirit remind them of all these things. Thus, they are being told that the Word is critical for them in order that, later, they would be able to recall that repentance is a gift worked by God through His Word and they be returned to the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

Jesus knows where each of you is going in the days, weeks and years that stretch out before you ... Tabitha, Henry and Jessie. In the next few years you will be going off in separate directions and it may not be in the way nor according to the will of the LORD God. The attractions that pull one away from God are great and you've even started to experience them and sadly, you've already started to fall to them ... like skipping catechism class on Wednesday ... or ignoring Sunday School because of a late Saturday night ... or developing an attitude that has little use for the Divine Service. Where will these lead you in the next decade? I don't know. Parents and parishioners don't know. Only God knows. Now, He doesn't want you to depart from Him, but He knows that, to one degree or another, each of you will. "And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe."

Having said that, please know that I'm not picking on you. You three are really no different than any of these adults here in the Divine Service. To one degree or another, they, like me, have fallen away. Some have fallen into great shame and vice. Others have developed a bad attitude and no longer care for Bible class or the liturgy in the Divine Service or supporting mission work. Still others have and follow their priorities for Sunday morning sports or weekends away from the Lord and His Church. Even saying such things angers the old adams here and they steam at such words that accuse. Then they depart from here and chatter about such things being said in a sermon. "And now I have told

you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe."

Even though such wicked thoughts and words and actions will happen, God knows about them and will deal with them. Now, how does He deal with such sinful sons and disobedient daughters of fallen Adam? Thus far the Law that shows us our sin and accuses us, for the answer to this question is most unexpected. The way God deals with sin and sinners is Gospel; that is, it is the Good News of God's forgiveness and where there is forgiveness, there is also eternal life and salvation.

God the Father, in His mercy, kindness and grace, has provided His Son as the Savior of the world. Rather than giving the world what it deserved, the Father has given unto His fallen Creation and rebellious mankind what was not deserved. Therefore, "let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." The Christ was incarnate by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary and was named Jesus. The Son of God is also the Son of Man and the Savior of the world. In His perfect Life and in His sin-atonement death Jesus gave Himself in order to be our Redeemer ... the One Who bought us back and He is the only One Who takes away the sin of the world, your sin included ... the sins of your past, the sins of the present and the ones of the future. "And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe." And because Jesus rose again from the dead, you have a future with Him, both in the days and years ahead and in the eternity that can come at any moment.

The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, works faith in the heart through the Word of this Good News. He did for you in your Baptism. This the Holy Ghost does each week in the Absolution, where you are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This soul-cleansing and spirit-renewing Word of comfort gives peace to you. Or, as the Holy Spirit caused the very Words of Jesus to be written in the Bible for our remembrance, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you."

This Good News is what you have been taught at home, in the Divine Service, in Sunday School and in Catechism Class. You have been taught the truths of the Christian faith and have looked forward to even more of God's Gospel; that is, looking forward to the Lord's Supper. You have been told why people commune and what they will receive. Do you remember? The "why" is that you desire to commune with Christ is because of His Word of invitation to His Table for the remission of all your sins. The "what you will receive" is the bread and the Body of Christ, the wine and the Blood of Jesus, and the forgiveness of all your sins. Thus far the Gospel.

Now a question to the other communicant members of this congregation. Will there be a belfry here for the bats to come home to? In other words, will there be a congregation of Christendom here to receive these young people back when they have repented of their sin and returned? Will the ancient liturgy of salvation by grace through faith in Christ be hymned and heard, or will it be a litany of man's emotional testimonies and supposed good deeds? Will the kettle drum of noise displace the baptismal font of grace? Does God want His Word of pure Absolution replaced with manageable law and conditional Gospel? Will you not take a stand on God's Word in this time of persecution? Does Jesus want someone messing around with the Lord's Supper, creating doubt and uncertainty, changing His Word or ordinance? How much false doctrine does the Lord want introduced into His Church and imposed on His children? Christ will, indeed, not abide with such abuse and negligence of the Truth. He will remove His lampstand and no longer be graciously present with a congregation that departs from His Word. Is that what you want for yourself and for Henry, Jessie and Tabitha and for the children here? Thus far the Law.

The Father gave His Son for the world and that includes you. Jesus was born for you, lived for you, fulfilled the Law perfectly for you. He Who is the Truth taught the Truth for you. The miracles that He performed were for you. He went out into the desert to defeat the Devil for you. Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified in your place and gave of Himself to satisfy the wrath of God for you. All your sins have been paid for. He died for you and was placed in death's chilly tomb for you. Jesus descended into the hell to proclaim victory over that God-forsaken place for you. Our Redeemer rose again from the dead for you and ascended into heaven for you and, in addition, is still truly with you forever. The Father and the Son have sent the Holy Spirit for you and the Holy Spirit works through the Word to give you faith and keep you in the one truth faith unto life everlasting. God has given Baptism for you and Jesus gives His Body and Blood for you for the remission of all your sins. The Christ has provided His Church with angels to proclaim in the absolution that you are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Thus far the Gospel.

Jesus said, "If a man loves Me, he will keep My Word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our Home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My Words; and the Word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's Who sent Me. 'These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard Me say to you, "I go away, and I will come to you." If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe."

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