

SERMON  
 First Lutheran Church  
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Luke 7:18-35  
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen  
 February 12, 2017

## **ADULT MESSAGE**

**“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”**

John the Baptist **expects heads to roll**. People have not been living the way God expects. John’s cousin Jesus has come, God’s Messiah, to save the people. John has been baptizing people with a baptism of repentance – a call to **turn back to God** and to **start living godly lives**. John has promised God’s judgment and wrath on all who fail to turn.

Now Jesus has supposedly brought God’s new kingdom and John expects heads to roll among the powerful religious and political leaders, among the godless sinners. Instead, John finds himself rotting in one of King Herod’s stinking dungeons. John has been faithfully proclaiming God’s Word; crowds of people have come to be baptized by him. But Herod has imprisoned John because John spoke against Herod for stealing Herod’s brother’s wife.

John expects heads to roll, but now instead, John sits locked in a dungeon and evil continues to hold sway. Jesus hasn’t brought judgment at all. . . John is the only one whose head seems in danger of being cut off. **“Are you he who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”** **“Jesus, what are you doing about evil people and evil deeds?”** Sometimes the world can be so dark. . .

I share a little piece written by Loren Eiseley, anthropologist, entitled,  
**“The Singers of Life.”**

(From “Creative Brooding” by Robert Raines, The Macmillan Company,  
 New York, 1966.)

“One day Loren Eiseley leaned against a stump at the edge of a small glade and fell asleep.

When I awoke, dimly aware of some commotion and outcry in the clearing, the light was slanting down through the pines in such a way that the glade was lit like some vast cathedral. I could see the dust motes of wood pollen in the long shaft of life, and there on the extended branch sat an enormous raven with a red squirming

nestling in his beak. The sound that awoke me was the outraged cries of the nestling's parents, who flew helplessly in circles about the clearing. The sleek black monster was indifferent to them. He gulped, whetted his beak on the dead branch a moment and sat still.

Up to that point the little tragedy had followed the usual pattern. But suddenly, out of all that area of woodland, a soft sound of complaint began to rise. Into the glade fluttered small birds of half a dozen varieties drawn by the anguished outcries of the tiny parents.

No one dared to attack the raven. But they cried there in some instinctive common misery. The bereaved and the unbereaved. The glade filled with their soft rustling and their cries. They fluttered as though to point their wings at the murderer. There was a dim intangible ethic he had violated, that they knew. He was a bird of death. And he, the murderer, the black bird at the heart of life, sat on there, glistening in the common light, formidable, unmoving, unperturbed, untouchable.

The sighing died. It was then I saw the judgment. It was the **judgment of life against death**. I will never see it again so forcefully presented. I will never hear it again in notes so tragically prolonged. For in the midst of protest, they forgot the violence. There, in that clearing, the crystal note of a song sparrow lifted hesitantly in the hush. And finally, after painful fluttering, another took the song, and then another, the song passing from one bird to another, doubtfully at first, as though some evil thing were being slowly forgotten. Till suddenly they took heart and sang from many throats joyously together as birds are known to sing. **They sang because life is sweet and sunlight beautiful**. They sang under the brooding shadow of the raven. In simple truth they had forgotten the raven, **for they were singers of life, and not of death.**"

John the Baptist cried out for people to **turn back to God** and to **do what was right**. An enemy army occupied their land. A puppet King Herod ruled over their lives. Their priests looked down their noses at them. **And who will save the people?** John expected heads to roll, but not his own. He asked Jesus, "**Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?**" "**Where are you God? What is your will for our world?**"

Today **drugs and violence, prisons and poverty** occupy our land. Today **puppet rulers govern** at the behest of powerful corporations and individuals. Today too many **religious leaders look down their noses** at

those whose Christianity they consider to be inferior to their own. **And who will save the people?**

In the early 1970s, **Reserve Mining**, every hour, was pumping tons of asbestos laced tailings into Lake Superior. Yes, they employed a few hundred workers. And they earned dividends for their stock holders. But, a hundred thousand people in Duluth were drinking asbestos laced water as a consequence. Someone spoke up. The dumping stopped.

**Refugees from Sweden**, our grandparents and great grandparents started this Christian congregation here in Aitkin County, Minnesota, USA. They came here to escape forced military conscription and devastating poverty. They came here for a new start and a safe place to raise their families. **Thanks be to God** that they were able to stay, **that we have the privilege of living in this free country, “with liberty and justice for all.”**

John the Baptist spoke up in the face of evil and powerful King Herod chopped off John’s head. From the dungeon, before he died, John asked Jesus, **“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”** What did Jesus say? **“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”** **And who will save the people? Jesus.**

**Heads didn’t roll because of Jesus.** No, because of Jesus, **sick** people were cured, **hungry** people were fed, **strangers** were welcomed and **poor** people were given hope. Jesus **taught and did** these things in God’s Name and with the power of God to give life. Then the powerful people, political and religious leaders, big shots and those who thought they were big shots – **killed Jesus too.** They raised a **mob of angry people.** They **deceived those folks** by telling them that Jesus was going against God’s will. Then they all chipped in and killed Jesus. **Shouts of “Crucify!”** **Cross. Grave. Stone. The End. . .**

**No, not for Jesus.** Not with God. **Sin, death and the power of evil** do not get the last word in God’s story. **Resurrection, life and salvation** are the last words in God’s story. Powerful people and corporations are rewriting history all over the world right now. Death and despair are

rampant. Meanwhile, Jesus still speaks to the **deaf**, the **blind**, the **poor**, the **strangers**, the **refugees**, the **children**, the **prisoners**, the **dead even**.

Jesus is a **singer of life, not of death**. Jesus speaks **love, not hate**. Jesus speaks **reconciliation, not division**. The **darkness of hatred, selfishness and death** still sits perched high on the branch over our heads. **Too many little ones have been consumed** by its gaping jaws. But Jesus didn't/ won't let that stop him. Sometimes the world can be such a dark place. **And who will save the people? Jesus!**

Is this a time for **God's judgment – heads will roll**? Or, is this a time for **God's salvation – wholeness and healing**? Is this a time to be **quiet**? Or is this a time to **speak**? Will **evil** have the last word in your life, in your world? Or will **Jesus**?

Come, Lord Jesus, and **speak to us**. Come, Lord Jesus, and **speak through us**. **Despite all the evil and hatred** that surround us, help us to be **singers of life**. Thanks be to God. Amen.