

KIDS OF THE COME BACK KING

I prepared this sermon with a Pepsi at my side. Back in mid-March, just days after our first shutdown due to COVID-19, I shared with many of you that my mornings always feature one regular Pepsi and one diet Pepsi. Despite all that's happened in the year of our Lord 2020, this hasn't changed. Depending on the weekly sale prices, a diet Coke may sometimes take the place of the diet Pepsi, but the basic pattern has remained unchanged. In the morning, every morning, there's one fully-leaded soda and one unleaded soda.

Yet even as I remain a creature of habit in some ways, I am in other respects different than I was back in mid-March. There's no doubt I am again a bit wearied, a bit dazed and confused, after once again having to reorganize our schedule and much of our ministry at a moment's notice. After the latest governor's order on Thursday, I said more than once I felt like it was mid-March again. Most people thought I was referring to the weather being a bit nicer. I was actually referring to how my mind was again in wearying overdrive as it was back in mid-March when a flurry of public health orders kept showing up; one on the top of the other. People in every sector of life know what I'm talking about. Maybe this is another reason why the sale of pajamas skyrocketed in 2020. Involved with all sorts of rapid-fire change, we've been stretched to the limit sometimes and therefore in need of more sleep than usual; making a good set of pajamas all that much more important. But even so, here at Mount Calvary we've managed to rise to the occasion.

It's one of the big reasons I'm feeling different than I was back in mid-March. These past nine months the way we've together risen to the challenge before us has been incredible. This sermon is being made available today through the FM dial and through the internet. Later in the week it will show up on Facebook, in email inboxes, and in envelopes mailed to those who aren't computer or cellphone savvy. Eleven days from now, on Christmas Eve at both 2:30 and 4:30, we'll be worshipping in our cars over at 423 Walters Avenue, as we also worshipped in our cars on Easter Sunday, Mother's Day, and every Wednesday throughout the summer and fall. None of this was on our radar, much less possible, just a few months ago. And this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to all the new and formerly unthought of things we've done this year.

Throughout 2020, I've often said I'm glad I spent a lot of time dancing back in high school and college. It's what we've been doing again and again. We've had to dance our way through night after night; through unknown circumstance after unknown circumstance. Perhaps the band Genesis had this sort of thing in mind when they once wrote a song about dancing on a volcano. All I know for certain is that God has used us to create something out of what often appeared to be nothing again and again in 2020. It hasn't been the virgin birth, but it's been remarkable nonetheless. How could it be any different! We're kids of the comeback king, you and me.

You know that, don't you! We're kids of the comeback king. Through the sacrament of holy baptism, we've been forever adopted as children of the Most High. We are and shall remain sons and daughters of God. And my, oh my, is our Father through baptism the king of the comeback. In our reading from Isaiah, reference is made to how God shall build up the ancient ruins and raise up the former devastations. This was originally a reference to God bringing Israel and its capital city of Jerusalem back from the devastations the Babylonian Empire had meted out in 586 BC. It's come to refer to much, much more since then.

In 70 AD, doing its own version of what Babylon had done before, Rome would raze Jerusalem and its Temple to the ground. And yet, as I did earlier this year, people still pray at the remaining wall of Jerusalem's former Temple nearly two thousand years later; with people waiting in long lines to do so. The bottom line is: God's people have taken Babylon's best shot. God's people have taken Rome's best shot. God's people have taken the best shot of despots like Adolf Hitler and of despotic regimes like the former Soviet Union. God's people have survived the Black Plague. And when our troubles haven't come from without, they've come from within thanks to our sins. But even so, we're still standing. We keep rising from the dead. Our faith is alive and well thanks to God, who remembers his mercy from generation to generation. You and me, we're kids of the comeback king. My faith in this identity has been reinforced over and over again this year. But back in mid-March, when I first introduced you to my early morning devotion to Pepsi products, I must confess that my faith in our identity as kids of the comeback king wasn't quite as strong as it is now. Why was this?

Most generally it was because I'm a human being through and through. I am a pastor, but being ordained doesn't make you superhuman. On the day when I accepted the call to serve my first congregation after seminary, I told the good people of Faith Lutheran in New Florence that I was just an Okie from Muskogee. I've always liked that song by Merle Haggard. Unlike Merle, I've got no claim to being from Oklahoma, but ordination or not, I am just an average, ordinary human being with the same fears and doubts as everybody else. Back in mid-March, those fears and doubts were looming larger than they are today. This was only natural.

Back in mid-March, so much of what we had known before was thrown out the window with virtually no warning and we feared the shoe would drop even harder in the days to come. In some ways, it did, but we still managed to rise up from the ashes by God's grace. Will we remember this the next time change comes our way and march on with our faith and our hope uninterrupted? Probably not. Unless we become superhuman, we're never going to be free from fear and doubt on this side of the hereafter. But perhaps, we can over time reduce the degree to which we fear and doubt that we are not in fact kids of the comeback king.

With that in mind, for me, getting up and back at it again has been important. I've been known to say that God finds us most powerfully not in the sugar of life, but in the salt and vinegar of life. In good times, but even more so in bad times, when we remain active and observant, alive to the new things God is always doing, we're blessed with additional reasons for thanksgiving and our reading from 1st Thessalonians does say we should give thanks in all circumstances. It's no wonder why this encouragement is extended. When we're active and observant, when we count our blessings, particularly when we're knee deep in the salt and vinegar of life, we're reminded anew and afresh that we are in fact kids of the comeback king and that reminder gives us what we need to get up and back at it again; paving the way for additional reminders that we are in fact kids of the comeback king.

And speaking of the reminder that we are in fact kids of the comeback king, Scripture too is adept at delivering and reinforcing this message. As it should be, my language of being kids of the comeback king came after, not before I engaged

today's collection of scriptures. Imagine how much more often we'd be reminded of our identity as kids of the comeback king if our exposure to Scripture involved every day of our lives rather than just an hour or so on weekends. If it's not already happening, let's find our way through to God's word more often. If it happens, with Mary the mother of our Lord, we'll more often sing out, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Yes, with Scripture's help, we may even make one of Tom Petty's songs our own; singing out, "You can stand me up at the gates of hell, but I won't back down because I know, I know, I'm a kid of the comeback king." Amen!