

Vicar Lincoln Albrecht Jan. 3rd, 2010

“How can I be sure of this?” Gabriel had delivered an unbelievable message in Zechariah’s mind. That he and his wife, Elizabeth would have a child. Zechariah was dumbfounded, and ultimately dumb-struck. He doubted that God could do this. The irony of the situation is the promise which he held so dear—the promise to Abraham and his descendents—also included a miraculous birth from parents well advanced in years. Zechariah doubted God’s messenger, so God sent a powerful reminder to him. Zechariah wouldn’t be able to talk until his son was born, and named John. His last words were “How can I be sure of this?” So God sent a powerful reminder to reassure Zechariah of his ability to do the improbable and the impossible.

To us, this seems easy to trust God to fulfill. Consider all the parents who were once barren that God provided with the blessing of children. Jacob & Rachel, Manoaah and his wife, Elkanah and Hannah—God had heard their cries or seen their plights and blessed them with sons. God had proven his power over barrenness even in the elderly. Who could forget Abram & Sarai—how she laughed in the face of God’s promise of a son? After all those instances it seems barrenness was an easy one for people to believe God would overcome.

So it is easy to criticize Zechariah—question what he was thinking, why he doubted God. We think we would have received God’s promise much better than Zechariah. But how have we done with the promises we have received? We confidently confess that God has completed his promise to Abraham through the life, and death of his Son. But that has already happened. How do we approach God’s promises for our everyday lives, his promises of what is still yet to happen? There our confidence is as strong as Zechariah’s. We too respond with the words “How can I be sure of this?” Because everything around us tells us we can’t or at least shouldn’t be sure of it.

He promises us that he has defeated death—yet in death many who appeared strong are shaken. Questioning how God could take someone so early, in such a tragic way. Then when we are faced with our own mortality we try to bargain with God. Promising him that we will serve him better, more. We try to convince God we still have more to do.

Our God also promises that he has defeated the devil and the sinful world—that they no longer have power over us. But again, when tragedy strikes, when our faith is placed in the hot fires, we question God. Question how he could allow bad things to happen to good people. Question how he could allow Satan to even talk to Eve in the Garden. We question his wisdom. God if you really know everything in advance, how can you allow all these bad things to happen? When Satan and others attack our faith, we get mad at God. Asking why he didn’t give us more answers. Why he didn’t demonstrate his power clearly to our attackers right then and there. We think ourselves wiser than our God. Imagining that if we had all the abilities of God that we would have made the world better or at least we would make it better now.

But it is his promises about the victory over the sinful nature that we question most often. We see the failings of others—the so called baptized and washed children of God. We wonder if God is working in their heart. We question what God could have seen in them—what he sees in them now. Because we don’t see anything that demonstrates their faith. Did their baptism work? And we question the effectiveness of our own baptisms. Was it anything more than a comforting symbol—a historic practice that makes us *feel* closer to God?

We see our own failings; we don’t feel like a redeemed child of God. We know that we don’t act clean. We know of our struggles against the sinful nature—and again we blame God. Why didn’t you take away this nature completely in my baptism?

All around us we feel the attacks of our enemies. Zechariah did too. So he sang. Not of the miraculous restoration of his speech. Not even about his 1st born son. Zechariah sings that our God has raised up a horn of salvation—God has sent his Messiah. In the horn we have a picture of the strength of a proud animal. Lifted high, a symbol of power and strength. Lifted high to demonstrate the victory achieved. Lifted high, to inspire confidence.

He has delivered us from the attacks of all our enemies—from the world, the devil, the sinful flesh. This horn of salvation is the Christ. For Zechariah he still was looking forward to the birth of this child—but he looked forward in view of the promises God had given concerning this child. The Christ would come from the house and line of David, but his royalty would not be obvious until after his death. It was the raising up of the horn of salvation that demonstrated his victory most clearly. But as the horn of salvation was raised high on the cross, victory didn't look accomplished or assured. But our God promises us that through the physical death of the Christ our spiritual life would be ensured. Zechariah speaks of this promise being as good as done, even though at this point, the Christ child was yet to be born. He could speak this way because it was as good as done. God had promised it. He made an oath by himself, the most loyal, truthful, honest, honorable thing one can make an oath by. He sealed his promise with his inviolable name—promising us that we would be heirs of his kingdom through the last will and testament of his Son. Zechariah describes God's promise of our salvation as a will—a legally binding contract that only is in effect when a person dies. Christ's death, the moment where it looked most like our victory was in danger of being lost, was the final seal of our inheritance. His death ensured our life. The raising up of the horn was our redemption.

So we raise up our horns, to proclaim our redemption. The horn had many pictures in Scripture. The first we spoke of was a noble animal horn, head raised high, demonstrating power and strength, proclaiming victory over fallen foes. But the horn was also used as a musical instrument to proclaim victory. Remember Jericho. The Israelites marched around Jericho and sounded the horns of a ram, proclaiming the victory God had given them. Remember Gideon's men. They broke pots with torches inside and sounded horns or trumpets proclaiming their victory over the Midianites. They experienced victory not because they, in and of themselves, were a superior force. They proclaimed victory because God had given their enemies into their hands. It was done. The victory was no less real, no less necessary, no less sweet.

And we raise up our horns for the same reason. To proclaim the victory that he has won for us over our enemies. We were not, we are not responsible for the victory, but it is no less real, no less necessary, no less sweet for us. The horn of salvation has triumphed over sin, death, and the devil. The horn of salvation has destroyed the power of the sinful world around us.

The death and resurrection of the horn of salvation, the death and resurrection of Jesus, demonstrated his true strength over death.

His perfect life, his complete obedience to the Law and his silent acceptance of the pain and punishment that our sins deserved demonstrate his power over the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh. He was tempted in every way that we were and yet he did not sin. He resisted temptation from the world around him, and from within. The devil enticed him with physical food, health, and political prestige and he resisted. Now our archenemy is bound, desperately thrashing until the time when he will be sent to the lake of fire.

And our baptism assures us of all the horn of salvation has done, all his victories are ours. His blood has washed us clean. Through him alone we can claim victory over the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh. Because of him, and the victory he has given us we lift our horns high, sounding our song of redemption.

Because of his victory we now worship our God without fear. We have no enemies he has not defeated. The horn of salvation is triumphant. So we raise our horns and worship him, proclaiming his name, dedicating our lives to him. Our worship of him is not just a Sunday Morning thing—out of thankfulness for the victory he has given us, we dedicate our lives in service to him. We strive to live lives which keep his commands and his Word. Lives which demonstrate that this victory has separated us from the world around us—we live in this world but we are no longer children of it. We hold his Word of promise near and dear—studying it daily, seeing how gracious and merciful our God has been. As we study and learn this we want to share it with others—inviting them to join with us, placing their trust in the horn of salvation, and raising their horns to glorify and praise God. This horn of salvation is the power of God, the strength of his love, the depth of his grace. It drives out all our enemies and all our fears so that we may join together in worshipping him in the holiness and righteousness that the blood of Christ has earned us. AMEN.

(Romans 15.13) May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. AMEN