

1 Sermon, February 6, 2011

Texts: 2 Samuel 23:13-17, Luke 20:9-18

Title: "God Forbid"

Dateline RIVERTON, Wyoming last May -- A Riverton landlord was charged with first-degree murder after he shot and killed a tenant after being pushed off a porch when attempting to evict him from a trailer home, a witness told police.

When the force of the push caused the landlord to fall backward over a fence and onto the ground, and the tenant proceeded to approach, the landlord pulled out his pistol and fired four times -- two shots each to the chest and leg of his tenant, according to the witness's account in a court affidavit.

The witness report comes from Michael Adams. He was the one who saw the landlord, 36-year-old Gabriel Drennen, shoot to death his friend, 29-year-old Leroy Hoster. That's the account from Riverton Police Det. Todd Baxter in an affidavit filed with the 9th District Court in Riverton.

In the affidavit, the victim's friend said he tried to help, but was prevented from doing so by gunpoint by the shooter and then took refuge behind a vehicle. It was from there he called police, and was on his cell phone as the shooter re-holstered his pistol and made his own 911 call, according to the affidavit. The shooter then held his hands over one of the victim's chest wounds until emergency responders arrived and took the injured man to the Riverton hospital. That's where he later died.

God forbid this should happen in Columbus!

This is exactly what Jesus was talking about in today's Parable from Luke. Some greedy tenants wanted everything for themselves, so they beat up the landlord's agent, and then a second and third agent. Finally, they killed the Landlord's son.

So the landlord will have them killed.

And Jesus' listeners said, "God forbid!"

Why did they say "God forbid"?

Was it a prayer, or was it superstition?

Was it a genuine prayer that God might not let this happen, or was it just a knee-jerk reaction to a terrible story?

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Was it a prayer for deliverance from bad things?

Or was it the ancient practice of “warding”? You’ve heard of warding off something. Well, our modern use of the word comes from the practice of magic — like wearing garlic to keep away vampires. Warding could be done with spells to the four directions, to keep away evil from the north, south, east and west. Warding is a superstitious way to try to keep out evil spirits with charms or incantations or spells.

When you say, “God Forbid!” it can be a superstitious way of trying to control the world with our words. Superstition is trying to understand or control the course of the universe with some little thing we do.

But when you say, “God Forbid,” it could instead be a prayer. In prayer, we *give up* control, and put it in God’s hands. If your belief and attitude is that God’s in charge, not you, then “God Forbid” can be a way of saying, “Lord, I hope this doesn’t happen, but it’s in your hands.”

Jesus, in telling about this parable, ended by saying that God is in charge. He cited a quote: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone’

Then Jesus said, “Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”

God is the rock on which our superstitions are broken. God is the rock on which our selfishness is crushed. God is the one who shows us our sin and demands that we repent. These wicked tenants in the parable show us a selfish part of ourselves, and we look at them and say, “God Forbid that our selfishness should take us that far.”

In other places in scripture, this phrase about the capstone or keystone is said to refer directly to Jesus, rejected by his own contemporaries, but the foundation of our faith. God forbid that we should reject Jesus.

“God forbid” is a biblical phrase. It is, in a way, a statement of faith, because by acknowledging that God can prevent something, we also say that God is powerful, and that God *cares* about what happens.

It means that we believe that God wants to protect us.

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One of the most interesting uses of the phrase "God Forbid" in scripture is the one from the Old Testament book of 2 Samuel.

You get the picture of David out in the field with his little army, hiding from the bigger and better equipped army of the Philistines. In his hiding, David got homesick for the fresh-tasting water of the well near the gate of Bethlehem, his hometown. David spoke idly, wishing he could drink that water.

Then, at great personal risk, three of David's followers, three "mighty men," went behind enemy lines to get water from that very well and bring it to David. You can imagine the kind of loyalty that implied. You can imagine how surprised and deeply touched David was by their act of loyalty and bravery. It was a powerful symbol of the lengths they were willing to go for David.

Well, David needed an equally powerful symbol to say how grateful he was to these three mighty men, so he refused to drink it and "poured out the water before the Lord." (Whatever that means!)

Then he said, "The LORD forbid that I should do this. Can I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?"

What David meant by "The Lord forbid" was that if he were to drink the water, he would be committing a sin. God would not want him to do this. So David would not. The mighty men had sanctified that water by risking their necks, so it was a matter of faith that he *not* drink it. It was setting a boundary; something done in faith.

That is another sense of the phrase "God forbid."

"God forbid that I should do this thing."

"Lord, keep me from doing this thing."

"God prevent me from this action."

Far from superstition, this use of "God forbid" trusts that God will help us avoid the pitfalls if we but ask. God will not only protect us from things beyond our control, but God will protect us from ourselves if we ask for God's help.

Today we share together in Holy Communion.

It, I'm sure you know, is not superstition.

In receiving Holy Communion together, we are not warding off evil, or trying to control our destiny.

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Instead, Holy Communion is a way of giving up our control, and remembering that it's all in God's hands. In Holy Communion, we bow before the awesome grace of God, and offer ourselves as an acceptable offering to the Lord.

We say, "Lord, forbid it that I should go against your will. Help me to know your will and do it."

"Towards the beginning of harvest three of the thirty chiefs went down to join David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the valley of Rephaim. David was then in the stronghold; and the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem. David said longingly, "O that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!" Then the three warriors broke through the camp of the Philistines, drew water from the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it; he poured it out to the LORD, for he said, "The LORD forbid that I should do this. Can I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?" Therefore he would not drink it. The three warriors did these things." 2 Samuel 23:13-17, NRSV.

"He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.' "But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!" Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone'? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.'" Luke 20:9-18, NIV.