

Lent 2C 13 March 2022
Luke 13:31-35
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
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Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'" Let's pray: . . .

The Pharisees come to warn Jesus: "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." And Jesus says, "Go and tell Herod to move aside because I'm coming through." The lines are drawn in the sand and a monumental battle is brewing; a battle between a cunning fox and a brooding hen. Who would you back? The fox, or the hen? It doesn't sound like a fair fight and it's not. We know who to back, don't we, because we know the outcome. But "at that very hour" everyone had their money on Herod. Only Jesus knew differently, "I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem."

Jesus is unperturbed. He will go to Jerusalem come-what-may. He will preach, he will teach, he will cast out demons, he will heal; his love will literally pour out on Jerusalem. Jesus will go about his Father's business and the Pharisees will go about theirs; each on a mission. Only, their goals are entirely at loggerheads. "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." These are threatening words, unwelcoming words, words of rejection. Yet, with that commanding authority and extraordinary, single-minded determination that we've learnt to associate with only one Man, God made flesh, Jesus rejects Herod's threat. He rejects Herod's false authority, and most tellingly, Jesus rejects the power of death. "You go and tell that fox Herod that I'm too busy to be bothered with a life-stealing, little animal like him. I'm busy healing and giving life. I'll leave when I've finished what I came to do."

Jesus is blunt in his defiance because he knows what Herod and the Pharisees don't. Jesus knows that his, "struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). The contest is never against the Herods or the Pharisees of this world. It's always against Satan, the forces of evil, sin and death; and, it's always with and for Jerusalem. In other words, it's always a battle for the hearts and minds of the people created in his image.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it."

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem." Jerusalem is the name of every family, language, people, and nation. Jesus is calling your name and my name. And he's asking me, "Gregory, Gregory, why do you throw stones?"

Stones are hard. They hurt, and they kill. But they don't even have to be physical elements used as projectiles to achieve this outcome. With the way my shoulders are these days, I can barely throw a stone. Yet, I can throw my weight around, and abuse the authority granted by my office. I can catapult my stubbornness to maintain my ignorance and resist change. I can project my arrogance to negate the value of other people's ideas. I can build walls of defensiveness and prejudice to shut people out and deny the dignity and humanity of others. All of which I am embarrassed to confess I have done. The ugliness of my sin knows no boundaries and it is armed with a plentiful supply of deadly stones.

The problem is, when we throw stones, we only hurt ourselves. Ultimately, we end up hurting and rejecting ourselves because we miss the real target. We become ensnared in the fangs and claws of the flesh enticed by sin. We deny that we are God's people. We aren't meant to be the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to it. We are called to be Jerusalem, the Holy City where God resides.

Thankfully, Jesus has his eye on the long game. Christ looks beyond the veil of our flesh and gathers us together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. He focuses unwaveringly, myopically on the road that leads to Jerusalem; the

road that leads to us. He refuses to let even the power of death control him. Nothing will interrupt his life-giving mission. How can Love do anything less?

Every day Jesus comes to us in the relentless waves of humanity that we share this planet with. We hear him in the cries of the oppressed, the needy, the hungry, the poor, the homeless, the dispossessed, and the war torn. We see him in the faces of those who are different from us, who scare us, who live on the fringe of what we consider acceptable, and those who would stretch us, confront us, and maybe even change us. We feel him in the touch of friends, parents, spouses, and mentors, who support, encourage, sustain, and challenge us.

All, are different facets of the One we call God incarnate. They're today's prophets calling us to live as the New Jerusalem. Every day they come. Wave after wave. Every day they stand a stone's throw away and ask us to choose. Are they prophets or targets? Will we say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord", or will we say, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you"?

Every day, we face this challenge. Every day, the question begs: Will we set ourselves as the norm by which all others are either accepted or rejected; or, will we live as citizens of heaven, conducting ourselves as Christ's brothers and sisters, Christ's friends, serving others with unconditional love and acceptance, even though they might persecute us? Will we come together as God's children and walk the way of the cross for anyone and everyone? Will we drop our stones and pick up our cross?

It's an arduous task, one littered with peril and hardship, and on our own we must admit that we're not up to the challenge. But, with Jesus who leads the way, we have the confidence to throw caution - our arrogance, ignorance, prejudices, doubts, and fears to the wind. Because with each step towards Jerusalem; with each step towards us, Jesus says, "I will heal you, forgive you, and make you holy." With each step towards Jerusalem; with each step towards us, Jesus says, "I love you and give you life - my life." With each step towards Jerusalem; with each step towards us, Jesus says, "I will pursue you to the very end - even to death and beyond."

And the reason Jesus does all of this, even knowing there's dirt on our hands and hearts from the stones we've cast, is because he knows that love is the only power in creation that overcomes, transforms, and saves. With each step Jesus takes toward us, the door to our heavenly home gets one step closer.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem. Look at my cross and remember. Jerusalem, Jerusalem. Remember my love and live. Jerusalem, Jerusalem. Live beneath my wings where you are safe." Blessed is Jesus who comes in the name of the Lord. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.