

Lent 2C

Luke 13:31-35

Washington, Washington! The city that kills 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!

I saw in the paper the other day that the last Senate page that Dan Akaki appointed would be leaving soon. That caught my eye because I had waged my own personal campaign to become the first girl page in Congress when I was in 9th grade in 1964. I was interested in politics and really wanted to be part of the center of decision making in this country. Both then and now, pages are appointed by Senators and Representatives according to seniority. But in 1964, girls were not allowed to be pages – I was told that we were not strong enough to carry the law books that pages were required to carry among members of Congress. I received over 20 responses from my own representatives to the President to Fishbait Miller, doorkeeper of the House of Representatives. You know, the guy who introduces the President of the United States before the State of the Union address. I tried anyone I thought might influence someone who would take a chance and change that unjust tradition. But the answers ranged from “if you want a career in Washington become a stenographer” to “I can’t help you” to “become secretary on a Senator’s staff” to “I have the seniority but the rules say I can’t appoint a girl.” No one had the courage to take a small but important injustice and make it right. Not even my own representative, Martha Griffiths, who served 20 years in the House of Representatives and was the major sponsor of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Washington, Washington, the city that squashes dreams and kills prophets . The place where men of power claim to be Christians and act like Pharisees and Romans. Where authorities send young men and women to far off lands to be killed. Where the vision of hope has become the reality of guns and death in the streets.

Consider the wasteland that was once the thriving city of Detroit; the murder capital of Chicago; the over-the-top wealth of Dallas; and the pending economic devastation of so many cities, including Honolulu, if the sequester kicks in. We are ruled by politics not compassion, by greed and self-aggrandizement not servanthood; by not budging on an issue rather than compromising. We deal in this country with our own Romans and Pharisees. I wonder too often whether the Pharisees and Romans of 2000 years ago were worse or better than our leaders are today. At least we don’t crucify people. We just electrocute them or inject them with poison. That’s far more civilized.

Jesus cries, “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

The Jerusalem of today is much like the old Jerusalem. The city of armed guards with automatic rifles patrolling the Via Della Rosa, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Wailing Wall, the Temple Dome. Teams of soldiers walking through the booths of cloth and hats and souvenirs and mosaics and rugs and tapestries. They have their rifles; the Romans had their spears. Neither has been hesitant to use them at will – and always with a ready justification.

Prophets – those truth-tellers that were thorns in the sides of the rulers and religious leaders and people of wealth and good lives – prophets are no more welcome today in this country and this world than they were in the millennia before and after Jesus, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah – Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr, Bobby Kennedy, Desmond Tutu – all spoke for a more just and peaceful society. But greed and power got in the way and continue to get in the way.

Do we have any prophets or truth-tellers any more in our country? Are there any prophetic voices that have even a small chance of being heard? Or have we scared them all away with our political corruption and easy access to weapons? Or do they see the futility of speaking out because no one really listens anymore and stand by while the people we have elected pursue their own narrow agendas based in personal gains and objectives. Have we all become numb to injustice and withdrawn into our own little worlds of survival and insulated ourselves against the ills and horrors outside our walls waiting for someone else to solve the social ills and injustices?

It's Lent, remember? We're called to a time of *self-examination and reflection and repentance, by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word.* We're called to stop what we're doing, to look around us, and to reorder our lives so that we can gather under the wings of Jesus and live as we're called to live, once we can honestly and truthfully say *Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.* We are called to be counter cultural – hear that again: COUNTER CULTURAL. We are called to speak out and become involved in issues that hurt our brothers and sisters. We are called to be unpredictable and say and do those things that may be out of character for us ... to do those things that push our communities and governments to become the servants we elected rather than people of power and privilege. We need to be prophets in the chambers of governments and on the boards of agencies and in the halls and meeting rooms of our schools. We need to be prophets especially in our churches, as we challenge one another to *Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.*

Lent is supposed to be a life changing time for each one of us. Will we open ourselves to new lives, new efforts, new ways of affecting the world around us that make a difference for those less fortunate? Or will we find reasons that we use so often to do nothing and be complicit in the silencing of prophets who prick the consciences of those who are responsible for the increasing chaos and fear in which we live.

Jesus says that when we can say *Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord* and mean it, then we will begin to see Jesus in our lives and in our efforts to be his disciples. And then he will gather us up under his wings like chicks, walking with us as we grow into his prophetic followers. Then we will change the course of our community and our nation. Then we will turn the world on its ear and become what God has always intended for us: a people of peace and justice and mercy. And Jesus will no longer have to lament that we ignore and kill prophets (metaphorically if not literally); if we use this Lent to reflect on our own lives and stop making rationalizations for being self-centered rather than being prophetic, if even in the smallest way, if we re-arrange our priorities to actually make a difference in the lives of people who are suffering on our streets, in our schools, in our churches and schools, then we will truly become followers and even companions of Jesus as we do justice in a humble and merciful way.

How often have I desired to gather you together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings but you were not willing? In this Lent, let us finally be willing. Let us not whine, *Oh what can I do?* but rather challenge ourselves, *Okay, what can I do?* Let us repent and change our lives so that we do make a difference that contributes to addressing the ills of our society, cleaning out the sickness and disease, and returning to the lives that God has intended for us. That is what Lent is about.

Amen.

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February 24, 2013