

Prayer: Tender Shepherd, my heavenly Father, thank you for your Son and my Savior and Lord. Use me to be a blessing to my city and empower me to share your saving grace given through Jesus, in whose name I pray. Amen.

“UNDER GOD'S WING - ACCEPTING THE OFFERED PROTECTION OF THE SAVIOUR AND NOT IMITATE JERUSALEM IN HER STUBBORNNESS AND HER DOOM!”

Now we come to the time in our worship, lifting up the Word of God; which is so important for us on this Lenten journey; such a blessed time.

And though it's only two verses, these two verses open up a whole world of important revelation for us. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me. And now, look, your house is abandoned. And you will never see me again until you say, ‘Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!’

Doesn't this passage, this haunting cry of Jesus, seem very heartbreaking even today? God longs to bless the people of Jerusalem. The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts remind us again and again of God's love for the great cities of that era in the world — Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth, Rome. Luke and Acts teach us how God longed to reach them with his grace through the gospel. Unfortunately, those cities rejected the message of Jesus as Jerusalem did. Their rejection of God's grace, ethics, and morals resulted in disasters for the cities themselves. For Jerusalem, however, the denial of Jesus was a worse rejection. Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, the promised hope of their Scriptures, sent to be their Deliverer. Let's not Fifth Ave. United Methodist Church be guilty of the same rejection. Let's understand God's desire to bring us under his wing of protection and respond by offering him our hearts, souls, minds, and strength.

Our text this morning records an event for us; an event from the last weeks of Jesus' life. Jesus is now returning to Jerusalem, the center of Israel's religious life. He's returning there, one last time to complete His Father's plan of salvation. Jesus knows very well that the cross is near. Jesus was a prophet, the latest in a long line of prophets; prophets sent by God to the nation of Israel. Jesus the Prophet entered Jerusalem one last time to make God's will known to a stiff-necked and uncooperative people. The prophets who had come before Him had often been treated badly some, like Jesus, to the point of death.

Luke chapter 13 has two basic themes. One is growing opposition to Jesus and to His ministry. The other is His determination to do His Father's will no matter what. As we read about the last days of Jesus' ministry in this season of Lent, it's obvious there's going to be a clash of strong wills. It's obvious something drastic is going to happen. When you think about it, no one goes through life without any opposition. And the same was true of Jesus. I pray, as I always do, that God would bless our encounter with His word this day; that His Holy Spirit would enable us to hear it, to understand it, and to put it into practice.

I have a question for you as I begin this morning. What was it about Jesus that bothered the religious leaders of Israel so much? Well, Israel's leaders thought of Jesus as someone who played fast and loose with their cherished traditions. They felt that Jesus' interpretation of the Scriptures was unorthodox. They cringed when Jesus re-interpreted their own Scriptures by saying: "You have heard that it was said..., BUT I SAY UNTO YOU..." The Jewish religious leaders were bothered by the way Jesus dealt with their beloved laws and regulations. It's important to remember that the Pharisees, one of the groups that made up the Jewish religious leadership, had meticulously divided up God's law into 613 separate commandments. Jesus knew that many of these commandments were not the will of God. Jesus upset the religious leaders by pointing out their hypocrisy. The Jewish leaders were offended by Jesus' attitude regarding the Sabbath. In their opinion, Jesus' behavior, in all of these areas, just wasn't acceptable. Jesus, for his part, told them that they had it all wrong. They kept the letter of the Law, he said, but broke its spirit and its intention.

Jesus didn't match Israel's expectation of what the Messiah would be like. They expected a political Messiah, someone who would raise up an army, and take out the Romans oppressors once and for all. Israel expected their Messiah to be a powerful military and political leader. And what did they get? They got a gentle prophet with no political pretensions; a man who, instead of hating the Romans, spent time with them and even did miracles for them, such as the time he healed a Roman centurion's servant. In our text this morning, the Pharisees came to Jesus hoping to slow Him down a little by bringing Him a warning from King Herod.

"Leave this place," they told Jesus and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."

We need to remember that King Herod had a problem with John the Baptist long before he had a problem with Jesus. John had confronted Herod's adultery and John did that directly and publicly. Herod's wife, her name was Herodias, covertly arranged for the death of John the Baptist and was able to carry it out when her daughter Salome danced for Herod and got him to promise her anything, up to half his kingdom. Herodias prompted her daughter to ask the king for the head of John the Baptist. And Herod was forced, against his better judgment, to grant her gruesome request.

By having John killed, Herod thought he would be rid of this thorn in his side once and for all. He had hoped that he could get back to his old ways with no further opposition from the religious community. But now he was hearing reports about Jesus – reports about His miracles and His teachings. Herod heard that Jesus and John were on the same page. The Scriptures tell us that Herod was curiously interested in Jesus. But, in the end, Herod rejected both the faith and the Savior who embodied it. And, when you think about it, the same is true today. Many find Christianity attractive, at least from a distance. But when they hear the details, they turn away. Many in our world find Jesus' teachings attractive. But few are willing to forsake all to follow Him. We can find many people today who are critical of the Christian faith.

In verse 32, Jesus replies to Herod's threats: "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'"

You'll notice that Jesus called Herod a "fox." Jesus considered Herod to be a cunning and shrewd character, not to be trusted. Bible scholars tell us that back in Biblical days, a fox was thought of as a creature of little importance. Jesus was saying that he was not going to be put off by Herod, a man he thought of as shrewd, but ultimately unimportant, in God's scheme of things. Jesus was saying that His ministry would continue and neither Herod nor anyone else would be able to stop it.

As Christians, we consider Jesus to be God's ultimate prophet. In many ways, Jesus was similar to the prophets who had come before him. Like them, Jesus spoke God's word powerfully, and without compromise. He had the courage to face evil and to tell the truth. He was willing to share the same fate many godly prophets before him had endured. But his final state was different from theirs. God accepted Jesus' death as full payment for human sin. Jesus' death on the cross brought life – eternal life – to all who would trust him as Savior and Lord. At this point, however, Jesus hadn't yet reached his goal. In other words, Jesus' work would not be completed, it would not come to perfection, until the cross and the empty tomb. That's why Herod's threats didn't bother Jesus. That's why Jesus wasn't upset by the Pharisees. "I MUST KEEP GOING," he said. In other words, "I must reach my goal, for your sake."

Jesus paid a debt he didn't owe. And we owed a debt we couldn't pay. Our text this morning – on this second Sunday in the season of Lent – is chock full of powerful emotions. One of them is frustration. Jesus was frustrated because the leaders of the Jews rejected him, and his teachings. But, when you think about it, the Jewish leaders were frustrated, too. They were frustrated because Jesus was not the kind of Messiah they had been expecting. They were frustrated because many of the common people accepted his teachings and were not listening to them any longer. At this point, so near the end of his ministry, Jesus felt scorned. And you can't blame him. His message had been largely ignored. His gracious gifts had been thrown back in his face. Those who rejected him had no one to blame but themselves. Jesus' frustration is clearly heard in our text this morning:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is desolate and abandoned.

Parents grieve over their rebellious children. Luke’s portrait of Jesus grieving over Jerusalem is dramatic. Jesus is depicted as a brokenhearted mother or father, lamenting over her stubborn children.

Like parents weeping over children who have rejected them, Jesus laments, he grieves and in doing so, is shown to be the living embodiment of Israel’s God.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her: how often I have longed to gather your children together in the manner that a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing.” {to be gathered} Luke 13:34

Jesus laments over the stubborn city of Jerusalem. Its people have rejected him as Messiah and Lord. Despite the fact that he knows they will soon throw him under the bus, unjustly crucifying him as a common criminal—the ultimate rejection—Jesus yet laments over them.

He grieves over them like a mother without self-pity. He doesn’t plot revenge. He doesn’t hate them for their stubbornness. He doesn’t wish them evil. He doesn’t call down curses on them. Instead, in the face of certain rejection, Jesus grieves as a brokenhearted mother. Jesus’ heart-felt care mingled with grief echoes God’s care for His people.

“As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young, as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions, the LORD alone guided him.” Deuteronomy 32:10-12 "Under His wings you will find refuge." Ps. 91:4

Astonishingly, the providential care of Israel’s God and the cry of Jesus’ heart are shown to be parallel. Just as Israel rejected the God who spread His wings over them, so also Jerusalem rejected Jesus, portrayed as a loving mother, longing to spread her wings over them.

Luke wants to persuade us that Jesus is more than a disappointed mother. He is no less than the living embodiment of Israel’s God. The outstretched wings of Jesus belong to none other than the outstretched wings of Israel’s God.

Those wings still reach out today to gather a brood. Is he reaching his wings out to you? Have you been gathered? Are you safe and secure, gathered under the shadow of His wings?

Or, have you stubbornly resisted the shelter of those wings? Have you rejected the security of those care-filled wings belonging to the Lord God? Does Jesus still lament over you? Is he saying to you: “how often I have longed to gather you under my wings?” But, sadly, like the children of Jerusalem, are you still unwilling? That cry of Jesus to you comes from the heart of Israel’s God. Can you hear that cry? Can you see those wings stretched out to you?

Reconsider your stubbornness. Hear his lament over you. See his wings outstretched to you. Lower the dark flag of resistance and in its place raise the flag of surrender. By faith, run to the wings of Jesus today and discover the safety and security of life hidden under the shadow of his wings. There you may abide safely forever.

The Lord desired to save, but never would force salvation on any nation or any creature. Indeed, a forced salvation would be futile, and mercy received against one's will could do no good. The illustration used by our Lord implied that danger was at hand. Observe a hen in the open field, happy with her chickens running about her, picking and chirping in the sunshine. Suddenly a hawk appears in the air, or some mischievous animal comes slyly over the ground. On the instant the hen calls her brood to her, covers them with her wings, and is ready with her defense.

Timid enough at other times, she is brave for her chickens, and will die rather than let one of them be lost. So, the Lord Jesus, perceiving the danger which hovered over Jerusalem long before the Jews were aware of it, was willing to cover and save them. So also is it in every age and every nation. He who is the Saviour of the world sees the approaching perdition of ungodly humanity, and is willing to deliver them. Those who come to Him He will in not cast out. What a simple way of salvation! And how sure and perfect the defense! When lambs are startled, they run to the ewes; the kids to the she-goats. Among the fiercest animals, the young run to their mothers for protection, and these will guard their offspring at whatever peril to themselves. But no animal, wild or tame, can cover her young so completely as a bird can do with her folding wings. Therefore, it's this last illustration of the sufficiency of Christ to save that solidifies his desire to protect and save us. Those who trust in Him are completely covered by His righteousness and strength. On this, the Divine salvation has always been revealed. The Psalms frequently refer to the favor and protection of Jehovah as the shadow of outstretched wings (Psalm 17:8; Psalm 36:7; Psalm 57:1; Psalm 61:4; Psalm 63:7; Psalm 91:4). Our Redeemer's lament over Jerusalem shows what His heart is toward all humanity. It is a grief to Him to have His offer of salvation slighted, a joy to have it embraced. Unhappy is the mother-bird while any of her brood continue astray and neglects her call! What manner of persons Christians ought to be! What joy of faith, what restfulness of love should be under the covert of His wings! What nearness, too, to one another, and what obligation to sisterly and brotherly kindness! The brood are packed very closely under the hen.

"How often would I have gathered!" The Saviour desired and endeavored to gather the children of Jerusalem under his gracious guardianship, not once, nor twice, nor thrice; his effort was a frequent act of mercy; it was repeated and prolonged. God "bears long" with us, forbearing to strike though the stroke be due and overdue; he is "slow to anger and of great mercy." But he does more than that, and is more than that; he continues to seek us that he may save us. He follows us, in his Divine patience, through childhood, through youth, through early manhood, through the days of prime, or unto declining years, with his teaching and his influence. He speaks to us by his Word, by his ministry, by his providence, by his Spirit. He seeks to win us, to warn us, to alarm us, to humble, and thus to save us. At how many times and in how many ways does our Saviour seek us! How often does he endeavor to gather us under the shadow of his love!

Under His wings, under His wings,
who from His love can sever?
Under His wings my soul shall abide,
safely abide forever.

Dear heavenly Father, help us serve you, despite the world's criticisms and misunderstandings. Help us remember Jesus' courage and His determination to reach the goal set for him. In His most holy and precious name we pray. Amen.