

Today, Tomorrow, and The Third Day

Luke 13:31-35

Trinity Lutheran - Kearney, Missouri

February 24, 2013 – Second Sunday In Lent



In the name of the Father, and † of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. When I was in the Marine Corps, one of our favorite sayings was: “Life is tough, and then you die!” Perhaps that was an attempt to brush aside the weightier problems of life in a sinful, dangerous world. But when you think about it, could there be a more succinct description of our sinful condition? Apart from Christ, that’s the only reality any of us would ever know – a tough life, and then death – the very thing we’ve earned by virtue of our sin. But there’s something here even more profound to consider – and that’s that this is the very same reality Christ made His own when He entered into this world to be our Savior. His Life was tough, and then He died. In the footsteps of the Prophets He suffered persecution, rejection, and ridicule, then died a horrible death on the cross as the sacrificial Lamb of God – which would not be His end, but rather the perfect beginning of a life with no more suffering, sorrow, sickness or death.

In St. Luke’s proclamation of Christ as Savior, there are a number of definitive milestones I want to examine this morning – most specifically, His Baptism, Transfiguration, Crucifixion and Resurrection. Yet, there is a very real sense in which all of these are wrapped up in one event – His Baptism. It’s our Lord’s Baptism which was confirmed in His Transfiguration – and from which He “set His face” toward Jerusalem and Calvary’s cross. It was on that leg of His journey that these Pharisees approached Him in this morning’s Gospel with their warning about the dangers He was about to face from King Herod.

Scholars have spent lots of time – wasted time, in my opinion – trying to figure out the motives of the Pharisees. Some maintain they were acting out of concern for Jesus – or because they wanted to avoid the turmoil they knew would erupt if He were killed. Others argue that they were acting with utter hypocrisy and intended Jesus no good. But regardless of their intention, the Pharisee’s “warning” *did* present a temptation for Jesus to seek comfort and ease rather than follow the way He’d been given to travel by His Father.

In the Church we sometimes speak of “giving up something for Lent” – perhaps to bring to mind our need for repentance – or as a personal reminder of the sacrifice our Lord Jesus made to save us. But Christ

didn’t “give up” anything, did He? Instead He “took things on” – such as when He took on the demons who possessed those He’d come to save – and when He took on the weight and curse of sin even to the point of death. But the things Jesus did are far more than just signs and proof of His identity. They’re manifestations of the Gospel. Jesus does what He does because of who He is, and what He came to do. Indeed, the healing ministry of Jesus embraces not just relief from physical ailments, but more importantly, the bestowal of the forgiveness of sins as He restores creation’s relationship with our Holy Triune God.

And all these things take place through the Cross and Resurrection – where who Christ is and what He does reaches its ultimate perfection. On the cross He assumed the world’s bondage to sin and buried it in His tomb. Then on the Third Day He released those who were subject to it by His Resurrection. And while today most see the events of Good Friday and Easter separately, I think it’s important to note that the Early Church viewed each of these as if they were one event – as if our Lord’s entire Life and Ministry from His Baptism through Good Friday on into Easter was one, long, continuous “Third Day” – a Day in which He comes to deliver His people and Church – that is, you and me – from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Hence, there was no way Jesus could have done what the Pharisees were suggesting – that is, leave and go about His business and life somewhere else, for His entire life was governed completely by the Will of God. His is a life of faithfulness like that of the Prophets before Him – and of the Apostles who would follow – a life of Faithfulness even in the face of rejection and death. The fact that even Jerusalem, the Old Testament Church, rejected and put to death the Prophets and Apostles who had been sent to Her by God reminds us that we must also be on guard against those things that would turn us against God and His mercy. It’s easy to point a finger at the world – at those outside the Church and those who have no desire to come in – but truth be known, it wasn’t the world, but the Church that rejected Jesus and put Him to death. It was those who had been called and chosen to be the people of God who turned their backs

on Him when He came among them in human flesh as their Savior.

And you and I are guilty of the very same thing whenever we place our trust and confidence in anything or anyone other than Him – whenever we use His Name lightly or fail to call upon it – whenever we're sluggish and reluctant to hear His Word and the preaching of it – whenever we neglect to remember the significance of our own Baptism – whenever we despise Christ's forgiveness in favor of our own feeble efforts at self-improvement – and whenever we approach the Altar of Christ with heavy hearts instead of joyful thanksgiving for the forgiveness we receive there. In truth, the very thing which lies behind all our sins and sinning is that we are rejecting not only our Savior, but also His good and gracious will toward us.

But getting back to the text, have you ever reflected on the words Jesus spoke in reply to the Pharisees – namely, that it isn't possible for a Prophet to perish outside of Jerusalem? Jesus' words are more than just a pattern of the past which required Him to die in Jerusalem. As the Prophet who is greater than Moses and Elijah – neither of whom perished in Jerusalem, by the way – and as the Fulfillment of the entire Old Testament and all its prophecies, Jesus would have to die in Jerusalem because He's more than a Prophet. He's the new, eternal Priest, Sacrifice, Temple, and City of God. In Jerusalem He would fulfill, supercede, and replace the past. He would establish in His own body a new House, a new Temple, a new City, and a new Church that would find its very existence – and be sustained totally – by His Body and Blood.

And what does it mean when Jesus spoke to Jerusalem saying: "your house will be left to you desolate?" Some see it as an obvious reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70 – and to some extent, it is. For the purpose of the Temple – indeed, its very reason for existing – was to prepare for and proclaim the coming of the Christ. In much the same way that Jerusalem in the Old Testament was a living Prophecy of the universal Church, after Christ's coming – and especially in the wake of His rejection by the Jewish nation and its leaders – there was no longer any reason for the Temple to exist. In fact, its continued existence would have been a blasphemous insult to God. Thus, after a thirty year window of opportunity for the transition to take place from the Old Testament to the New, our Lord brought His divine judgment upon Jerusalem by

means of the Roman army – no more city – no more Temple!

The whole purpose of the Temple and its destruction is to serve as a picture of Christ, who is the true House of God – the true Priest, Sacrifice and Temple – the Divine Presence of God among His people. The old Temple had to be destroyed because the new had arrived in the Person of Jesus. And as such, the House that would be left to the children of Jerusalem – that is to say, to the people of God, His Church – is Jesus Himself. So why did He say that this House would be left to them desolate? Because the way He became the new Temple was by allowing Himself to become the desolate One who would hang on the Cross for the sin of the world. It was the Sacrifice of Jesus in Jerusalem that constituted His identity. Indeed, it is only in His desolation as He hung there reconciling a world of sinners to Himself, that "Jerusalem" would ultimately be saved to dwell in utmost safety under the wings of the Lord.

The original Greek says that everything in our Gospel took place, "in that very hour" – which is even more precise and specific than the term "day" – which appears in most in English translations. This "hour" connects the Words of Jesus here in this Gospel to the words He spoke just a short time before concerning the heavenly Banquet Feast – to which many from all nations would be invited even while a goodly number of the Jews were excluding themselves. But all this is much more than just another boring history lesson, for what it teaches us – thank God – is that the Prophetic Ministry of Jesus, His coming in the flesh to be our Savior – which, by Divine necessity then led to His Passion and Death in Jerusalem – has now all been handed over to and perfected in the Holy Communion. For it was there and then, in that very hour, in His own flesh and blood, that our Savior releases and heals us from sin, death, and the devil, and bestows on us the saving work and benefits of His victorious Cross and Resurrection as He serves and shares Himself with us in the never-ending Feast of Heaven. To put all this even more bluntly: Jesus' Life was tough, and then He died – for you. And all this He did so that by His bloody death and glorious Resurrection we might have Life in Him, that is, in His Body and His Blood – today, tomorrow, and the Third Day – forever, and ever, and ever. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.