

“Desires, Plans and Intentions”

Luke 13:31-35

Second Sunday in Lent

March 17, 2019

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our text, Jesus says, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Sometimes, certain words of a Scriptural text beg for us to consider the context. The phrase that begins our reading, “At that very hour” asks us to consider what had already happened in that hour. In the words preceding our text, Jesus – travelling through towns and villages with his face fixed on getting to Jerusalem and the fulfillment of his salvific mission – is describing the great feast of heaven (the feast at which will dine the faithful from east and west, north and south) and Jesus specifically includes the mention of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets. But, the purpose of giving this joyfully serene picture is actually to forewarn his hearers not to grow complacent, lest they miss out on the narrow door to the feast. He says, as if speaking to the impenitent, “In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you

yourselves cast out.” And then he concludes with this, “And, behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

And *then*, “at that very same hour” our text unfolds. This helps us understand that – even if the pharisees of our text can apply Jesus’ comments to themselves – it really goes well beyond the pharisees, because Jesus has his eyes and face and mind set on Jerusalem – that place which is *supposedly* God’s city, and yet whose spiritual leaders and people are impenitent and whose ears are closed to the call to repentance. Jesus, almost as if ‘thinking beyond’ the diversion tactics of the pharisees, laments, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!”

Now, even without *historical* context, we can hear and envision Christ’s sorrow over the faithlessness of a people once known as God’s people. But, dig a little deeper, and we’ll understand Christ’s lamentation all the more:

Historically, the Sanhedrin was ‘the Supreme Court’, if you will, of Israel, and it met in Jerusalem. And, as had been established in the Old Testament, when a false preacher would be charged with false doctrine, he would be tried before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. So, all the towns and villages would send their false preachers to be tried in Jerusalem. But, throughout history, as all of Israel, and the Sanhedrin itself, fell into faithlessness and disbelief, the prophets

hauled off to Jerusalem to be tried and convicted and sentenced to death were not false prophets, but prophets of God Most High. And, as these prophets were one-by-one convicted and sentenced to death by stoning, all the while the Sanhedrin, and Jerusalem, and Israel thought they were doing God's will and were God's holy people. (By the way, how clearly does this illustrate the difference between being well-intended and *actually being faithful*.) Those who assumed they were first – God's chosen Israel – were last. Each time the Lord sent them a prophet to call them to repent and return to the Lord, they would kill the prophet to silence him and all the while claim they were living as God's people: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it (sent not only by the towns and villages as supposed imposters, yet first and truly sent by God as true prophets!). Doesn't St Paul say the same of the first-generation pastors of the Church when he says (in a reading we heard on Ash Wednesday), "As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way.... We are treated as imposters, and yet are true; [are treated] as unknown, and yet well known; [are treated] as dying, and behold, we live."

Yes, alive in the feast of the kingdom of God are not only Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but also – Jesus says – the prophets... those very heralds of repentance whose cries had fallen on deaf ears and were put to death as 'proof' of Jerusalem's supposed status as God's people... indeed, the first shall be last.

And so, Jesus laments over those who suppose their righteousness: “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken!”

Now if the cold hard truth of Jerusalem’s standing before God rings in your ears, then may the warning also ring in our hearts. How can we ignore the call to repentance and know any different result than Jerusalem? Oh yes, we will *hear* it, and we will nod in agreement, but do we actually repent? Or do we simply explain away our shame? “Well, God knows I try.” “Well, God knows I believe in Jesus.” “Well, everyone does it... that’s just the way our generation is.” “Well, if the prophets gave a more cheerful message, then I would listen.” That’s not repentance. That’s ‘falling back on our laurels.’ That’s complacency and supposition that the people of God need never repent. That prophet after prophet can come calling us to repentance – repentance for our sloth toward God’s holy Word, repentance for not living in ways that bear his holy name, repentance for not honoring father and mother, for harming our neighbor’s body – from conception to old age, repentance for adultery and divorce and promiscuity and homosexuality and extra-marital sexual lusts and practices of all sorts, repentance for stealing, for gossip against our neighbor, for coveting all that belongs to our neighbor... how much there is for us to repent of, and we would not. Instead, we take a page from Jerusalem and, in our supposed

righteousness as God's people, we find reason to claim 'false teaching,' 'irrelevant teaching,' 'unloving teaching' and seek to justify ourselves as we silence the prophets and think we are doing God's will by saying, "I will reinterpret the Scriptures here and there, but at least I still believe that Jesus died on the cross." The first will be last, and there will be great weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus gets to the heart of the problem when he keys in on one term from what the pharisees say of Herod. They said, "Herod wants to kill you." The Greek term here interpreted as 'wants' is the word $\theta\epsilon\lambda\omega$, and it means "desires, with specific intent and plans to achieve." But just as Herod has a particular desire in mind, later in the text Jesus says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often *would* I have gathered"... the English doesn't properly convey that Jesus is saying, "How often I have desired ($\theta\epsilon\lambda\omega$)... I have desired it, with specific plans and intents to achieve your salvation... I have sent prophets to call you to repentance, and – right in their hip pocket was the Gospel waiting to cheer the penitent; *but*" Jesus says, "you *would* not." There in the Greek is that same $\theta\epsilon\lambda\omega$ again: "You desired not. You had your own desires, with your own specific plans and intents to circumvent and replace *my* desires for you with *your* desires for you. You *would* not."

He who has ears to hear, let him hear: Jesus is not saying, "Gee, I'd really like to save you, but you have to make your decision for me before I can save you." You're not a neutral consumer

weighing out which gospel you are going to buy into. You're not 'choosing Jesus;' rather, you are choosing whether or not to trust and depend on yourself and your own righteousness and supposed status before God. Jesus is saying, "You have a will, you desire evil, but cloak it in good; you desire to silence my holy law, to not hear the call to repentance, and to replace it with your unholy will and righteousness before men, which may in the short term give you a false security in your status before God, but in the end will leave you outside the eternal feast, while the prophets are inside with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all from east, west, north, and south who heeded the call to repentance and were comforted and cheered with the Gospel. And until you are shown that, until you are brought to repentance, there can be no true gathering together of the faithful. Oh sure, you can show up in Jerusalem; you can come to the temple (or to this holy house), but where there is no repentance, there is no Gospel, no feast, to be had in fellowship with God."

"But," Jesus promises, "where the call to repentance does its work; you are brought to your knees and dismayed at how incapable you are of saving yourself and being your own righteousness, when it seems that all is lost and – because of your sins - you are certainly going to miss out on the feast, when you finally say, 'Lord, I have sinned for silencing the prophetic Word in my daily life,' *then,"* Jesus comforts, "then I have good news for you: I *desire*, with specific plans

and intents, *I* have specific designs for your salvation, and I will not be deterred from my plans.”

Friends, where you *should* be called to turn away from *your* plans of supposed righteousness, we desperately need Christ *not* to be deterred and turn away from *his* plans of righteousness. And so, how comforting in our text that he says to the pharisees, “I will not be deterred; I will not be sidetracked; I will not waver. Not today, not tomorrow, not the next day. I *will* go to Jerusalem; I will enter the city that bared its teeth in the face of the Holy Word; I will go right to the heart of the matter and contend with all the evil that silenced the prophets, and – when that third day comes, and the tomb stands empty, and the proclamation rings out anew of God’s holy designs for salvation – I will have finished my course.”

It’s a glorious, yet gloriously humble proclamation: Christ will not be dissuaded from going to the cross to die for the sins of the world; he will not be sidetracked or roadblocked from achieving your salvation. And all who repent of their own desires, their own “thelo’s”, their own specific plans and purposes to excuse their way into heaven or sweep their sins under the rug or present their own supposed righteousness... all who turn away from and repent of such self-deceptive desires and cling to Christ and *his* desires, his plan of salvation... you will not be put to shame.

Make no mistake: Christ achieves his purpose – He does enter the city to the shouts of “Blessed is he who comes in the name

of the Lord.” Sadly, he does not promise that all who sing that will do so in faith. At the end of the text, he implies that even those who ‘house is forsaken’, whose self-righteousness and impenitence and ignoring of and silencing of the holy Word leaves their house desolate and their hearts empty and their place at the feast given to someone else – even *they will* say on that Palm Sunday, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

So, hear the lesson well. For every Sunday, the feast is ours. Every Sunday, the refrain continues, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” Every Sunday, Christ is not deterred by the complacency of the world, by the roadblocks of Sunday morning extracurriculars and daily lives that live self-confidently in one’s righteousness before God while explaining away sin and silencing the holy Law. Despite the vast majority who would ignorantly and gladly align themselves with the self-assuredness of Jerusalem... despite all of that... for the sake of the penitent, for the sake of those who know their ways lead only to regret’s weeping and gnashing of teeth, for the sake of those who know they of themselves have no hope but to yearn that God’s promise to forgive and be gracious is *true*... for your sake, Christ is not distracted from bringing his gifts, but freely and regularly brings you the good news that He has finished his course and, as beneficiaries of it, you now join with the prophets, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and with all the company of heaven in the foretaste that forgives you *your* desires and assures you that

Christ's desire for you is indeed a seat in the heavenly kingdom to come.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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