

“We believe that we shall see the goodness  
of the Lord in the land of the living.” AMEN!

Sometimes, someone will ask we,  
“What it’s like going to the Capitol?”

And my first thought is that it’s like a hen  
walking into the fox house. :-)

It can feel like everyone in the building is  
an enemy that’s ready to devour you.

It’s the human condition, I suppose,  
to succumb to the temptation  
that it’s “us against them,”

but we must be careful with those  
thoughts and suppositions. (Pause)

Our lessons today remind us of this truth.

First, we read about a warning from the Pharisees.

They warn Jesus about  
Herod Antipas’ pursuit to kill him.

That warning should surprise you because often,  
in the gospels, the Pharisees are the ones

who want Jesus dead.

It's a reminder that not ALL of them  
were unified in that "deathly" desire,  
some cared about him and his safety.

Also, there's the truth that not all of Jerusalem  
wanted to kill prophets and stone those who  
were sent to the city.

Jerusalem is not the same as ALL the people  
who lived there.

For Jesus, Jerusalem represented something  
more than a location; something more than  
a city and her people there.

The Bible tells us of occasions when other  
prophets were, in fact, killed outside of Jerusalem.

So what does Jesus mean when he said,  
"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills  
the prophets and stones those  
who are sent to it!"

He sees something quite clearly, that others miss  
but does not specifically name it. (Pause)

The FSU Civil Rights Institute hosted

Pastor Lowden a couple weeks ago,  
and showed the documentary to us  
called the “President’s Pastor.”

It was a compelling story featuring  
the Rev Tony Lowden who served as  
President Jimmy Carter’s personal pastor  
for over thirty years.

Pastor Lowden spoke to us before and after  
the documentary and one of the things he  
said was that from the very first time he met

President Carter to the very end of his life,  
the president would ask him four questions:

Where have you been?  
What have you done?  
Who have you helped?

And the last was: How can I help you, help them? (2X)

As President Carter aged he could often only  
get the first question out, but Pastor Lowden  
knew he wanted to ask all four,  
so he’d take the time to answer all four.

You see, President Carter’s commitment

to humanity was deeply intertwined with  
his spiritual foundation and

the church was the guiding force in that journey.

It was his spiritual foundation that kept him  
from sending soldiers into battle during his term.

It was his spiritual foundation that led him  
to continue his work of service to people  
held down by systemic poverty  
after he left office.

Where have you been?  
What have you done?  
Who have you helped?  
How can I help you, help them?

His spiritual foundation that spoke when  
he said the nation was in the midst of  
a crisis of confidence.

A threat that is nearly invisible in ordinary ways.

Yet, it is growing in our lives, he said,  
and in the loss of unity and purpose for our Nation.

While, on the surface he was addressing  
the energy crisis that the nation was engulfed in,

in deeper ways, he was addressing  
the people's desire to have a strong man  
in office who'd do all the work for them.

He said, the people of the nation are what  
makes this nation strong, not the strong man in  
the Oval Office who wants to be glorified.

What made President Carter, and  
makes any leader that's worth their weight,  
is that they can be bold enough to say,  
"I cannot do the job alone."

Which means we must let our voices be heard,  
we must be able to say something good  
about our country and then join hands  
in service of helping.

Committing ourselves to a rebirth and  
to a working together. (Pause)

In rereading that speech from 1979,  
it dawned on me that President JC knew  
what Savior JC meant.

That what Jesus meant when he said,  
"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills  
the prophets and stones those

who are sent to it!”

Was not to call a city or location out or a people out.

He certainly wasn’t making a declaration  
that Christianity was to replace Judaism.

He was pointing to something much deeper and  
more pressing about the human condition.

That is: people want the glory of a strong man.

People do not want a God that will suffer. (Pause)

When Jesus said, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem,”  
he grieved for a city he loved, a temple he visited,  
and for a humanity that God loves.

It’s impressing to witness that with that grief and  
with that love Jesus pledged to continue  
on in God’s mission for the sake of the world.  
(Pause)

In closing, now we turn to that section of  
Deuteronomy that we read today.

The grotesque symbolism of animals sacrificed  
and cut into two parts.

It is shocking to our ears.

It is said that's where we  
get the term, "cutting a deal."

For that is what God is doing with Abram here.

They're cutting a deal; making a covenant  
with each other.

By walking between the slaughtered animals  
the words are said,

"I pledge myself to the covenant.  
If I fail, let me be cut in half as  
these animals are cut in half."

That's a serious pledge!

But look closely and notice who's  
walking the parted animals.

It's God!

It's God who pledges the willingness to die,  
if the covenant is broken. (Pause)

So, as a church, we name the reality.

We know, a hunger for power  
drives humanity in ways that  
break the covenant with God.

We know, safety and security tempts us  
to put our trust in a strong man,  
instead of God.

And we know, fear leads us to believe that God cannot  
choose to suffer on humanities behalf.

These hungers, insecurities and  
fears fuel our desire for a strong man. (Pause)

So, where have you been?

What are you doing?  
Who have you helped?

How can we help each other, help others?

AMEN!