

## **Lent 2 – The Fox and Hens (Luke 13:31-35)**

Today we have gathered once more to continue on Jesus' journey through Lent to the cross. This week we hear Jesus is approached by the Pharisees. The Pharisees were generally a group that stood against Jesus. In this instance though they come to warn Jesus that he must go because Herod wants to kill him.

Jesus insisted that the Pharisees return to Herod, the fox, and tell him, "Jesus is healing people of demons and performing some miracles for the next two days and then he is going to Jerusalem to try to gather people under his wings like a mother hen gathers her chicks." Jesus also said, "you will not see me until the time comes when you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." If you recall, Jesus is referring to his triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

Herod was murderously angry, for much the same reasons as God's prophets before, Jesus had angered the authorities. Jesus criticized the manner in which people in power exercised their power and failed to do God's justice.

Jesus's response to the Pharisees' warnings (13:32-33) is not only to brush their warning aside but also to challenge Herod. Jesus impudently refers to Herod as a "fox," implying that Herod is cagey and deceptive. Jesus asserts that he is going to continue his course and will not diverge simply because something about him and his ministry makes Herod nervous. Luke says that Jesus has resolutely, "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (9:51). Jesus will continue his journey to Jerusalem, continuing to preach, teach, and work wonders, come what may. And he does.

Jesus is depicted as courageous, determined, and rather contemptuous of the powers, political or religious, who try to dissuade him from that course.

Luke also portrays Jesus as sorrowful. Prophets had been killed in Jerusalem before (Jeremiah 26:20-23; cf. Matthew 23:29-30; Acts 7:52). Jerusalem was the city where Stephen and James would be martyred (Acts 7:59; 12:2). Like a mother hen, Jesus would have gladly gathered his brood about him, but the people had refused to be gathered and protected.

Jesus prophetically foretells doom upon the city, the great city which would be utterly destroyed by the Romans after an insurrection in C.E. 70.

Even as Jerusalem failed to heed the prophetic warnings in the past, Jesus says that they are doing the same thing again and that they will suffer under divine judgment. Suffering under the judgment of God may be an idea that we contemporary mainline Christians find hard to take.

Rather than speculate on the reasons for God's judgments, let's focus (as I think this week's passage does) on our response as those who are judged.

### **Proclaiming the text:**

Lent is the season of repentance, forty days of honest reflection upon our identity as sinners, yet sinners who, by the grace of God are being redeemed in Jesus Christ. We are being redeemed through the work that Jesus goes to do in Jerusalem, yet we shall not be redeemed unless we repent, unless we (to use the Greek word for

repentance) metanoia, turn around, allow ourselves to be turned upside down, inside out. Jesus calls us to repent.

There was a day when the church seemed preoccupied with this message that we are sinners in need of repentance. There was a day when, if you asked someone, “What do they do at church?” they would respond, “Church is where you go to be told that you are a sinner and that you need to get down on your knees and repent.”

I don’t hear that message too often in churches today. To be honest, I tell people that in my preaching I would like to err on the side of too much grace and not enough judgement than the other way around. Today, we are usually told that we are basically good people who are doing the best that we can, and the best that we can is good enough for God. God loves us, just as we are, warts and all. Talk of sin is depressing, and a put-down.

But this was not the message of Jesus. He was on his way to Jerusalem, where we will find that our sin is serious, so serious that we shall conspire to put the Son of God to death on a horrible cross. And he was put there, not for the things that we usually call ugly and evil, but for the things that we call good. He was nailed to a cross by religious people, all of whom thought that they were following scripture, doing the will of God. In this, the cross stands as a stark warning of the perils of our sin.

Yet, by the grace of God, the cross stands for us as a sign that God forgives, that Christ takes our sin on himself, bears it, willingly endures it, and forgives it. Among his last words from the cross, words that we’ll repeat here in a few weeks will be words

spoken to a somewhat repentant, not fully understanding thief who hung next to him on a cross. Then, looking down from his cross, Jesus says to the murderous crowd below him, "Father, forgive."

Therein is our hope, our only hope in our sin. Jesus moves to Jerusalem, not to punish but to call to repentance. He promises a people who have a long history of turning against the prophets, of ignoring the truth, a promise of forgiveness and new life.

I think that one of the most detrimental, evil notions among us is the simple conviction, "*People don't change.*" Wrong.

Even as he moves toward his certain death, Jesus calls on people to change. He calls on Jerusalem to repent. One might have thought after all of the teachings, after the centuries of prophetic warnings, it would be too late. But it's not too late. There is still time to repent.

And for us as well. Jesus may have more faith in you than you have in yourself. I know. Old habits die hard. You can't teach an old dog new tricks. Once a drunk, always a drunk. I know.

But here's what we don't know unless we are told by the gospel. In Jesus, there is a power unleashed in life, a power greater than that of our own devising. When God created us, Genesis says that God's image was stamped upon us. Admittedly, we have defaced that image terribly with our sin. Yet God intends to have God's way with us. By the grace of God, we can change.

That's a message behind today's gospel message: Not only must we change but because of the God we've got (or the God who has us) we can change.

Say what you will about the church being too judgmental, but you must admit that sometimes truth-telling can be an act of deepest faith. Is Jesus Christ, the One who not only tells the truth about our sin but also in the same breath forgives our sin? Is Jesus Christ capable of producing a new people, a re-formed humanity, a new people called church, or not?

We won't know if we avoid telling the truth, speaking the truth, and daring to be people who can listen to the truth, told to us by Jesus, without resenting him for it!

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Take a Lenten moment of self-reflection and think about your life as it has been and is. How have you wandered far from God's way? Have you failed to live up to your intentions? Who hasn't? Paul says we've all sinned and fallen short of the grace of God (Romans 3:23). All. What are those habits, those inclinations, those propensities that need to be changed if you would live a more abundant life?

The good news is, Jesus means to have you, to have all of you, you as you are, warts and all, and as he means you to be. The good news is you can change.

As Jesus pauses on his trek toward his cross, he weeps over the state of his beloved people, and well he may weep for us. But as he condemns us for our sin and failure to live as we have been created to live, as he states upfront our need to change, to repent, please don't miss the good news of Christ that is more powerful than any of our bad news: By the grace of God, you can repent. You *can* change. Amen.