

Sermon

Lent 2C March 16, 2025

Luke 13:31-35

In the context of the whole gospel today's passage comes not quite halfway between when Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" and his arrival on what has come to be known as Palm Sunday. Within this timeframe of Jesus' deliberate and steady move to Jerusalem, he rebukes disciples for wanting to destroy a town, teaches about what true discipleship looks like, sends out seventy missionaries, heals a number of people, tells a bunch of parables, and does some other stuff. In other words, he is really starting to make a name for himself.

But more than making a name for himself, Jesus is steadily moving to Jerusalem. We are called to take up our cross because Jesus himself will be lifted up on his cross. This sacrificial act was ultimately for the whole world. That act was to bring all creation out of death into life. I'm reminded of the old story where someone asks Jesus, "How much do you love me?" and Jesus responds, "This much," and he stretched out his arms and died.

I normally don't cross-pollinate gospels, but this is also a good time to remember John 3:17 – *God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

Today's gospel passage gives us a glimpse into this idea of God's universal salvation. Jesus speaks of Jerusalem when he says, "How often I've desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings." This lament was certainly directed to the people of Jerusalem, but we can also see it directed at us. If God is trying to gather us together as a hen gathers her chicks, how often have we been unwilling to be gathered up? How often have we pursued our own devices and desires? How often have we turned a deaf ear to God's call? And yet, God keeps trying.

This idea of God reaching out to all people is also reflected in HOW God reaches out. We are certainly familiar with images of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Lord's Prayer begins, "Our Father . . ." But if God is attempting to reach all people, then maybe God is also using more avenues than we normally think of.

In 2 Esdras for example (a book in the Apocrypha), God says this: *I have entreated you as a father to his son, as a mother to her daughter, as a nurse to her children.* This is one example of God appearing in ways that people will understand or have an affinity for. God is most often referred to as a father, but that doesn't mean God is male.

As another example, the Spirit of God is referred to as *Ruach* in Hebrew and *Sofia* in Greek - both grammatically feminine. The Wisdom of God as portrayed in Proverbs is also portrayed as feminine. And today Jesus uses that feminine image when he refers to the mother hen gathering her brood.

Right about now you may be wondering why I'm bringing this up, or where I'm going with all this.

We are in the Season of Lent - the season of prayer, fasting, self-denial, and repentance. We are in the season of preparing for Easter and new life. We are in the season of working to permanently change certain behaviors in order to draw closer to God. In this season we are, or should be, actively searching for God.

As we do this, we are asked to turn back to God from our sinful ways. In that turning, there is an offer of restoration. There is time to repent, receive pardon, to welcome the reign of God, and to be welcomed in. For this to happen, we are being given a variety of opportunities and voices.

We may hear God speaking as a loving father. We may sense God as the embrace of a loving mother. We may hear the voice of God in wisdom. We may experience God as understanding Christ's sacrifice. God makes this offer in a variety of ways for a variety of people - because my experience is not your experience.

That universal offer of restoration and salvation runs through Jesus' ministry. It runs through his Passion. It runs through his death and burial. It runs through his resurrection and ascension. That offer is made first to the people of Jerusalem and then to all Judea, Samaria, and the whole world with the goal of bringing everyone out of death into life.

God is so much bigger and mysterious than we are able to conceive. Yet in that vastness, God is calling each of us into a holy relationship. Whatever our Lenten disciplines, let us look and listen for the presence of God. And if you hear the voice

of God as a mother, so be it. If you hear the voice of God as a father, so be it. If you have an image of God as a mother hen protecting you under her wings, so be it. Because it's not important that you hear or see God in a certain way, it's important that you are open to meeting God in mysterious ways.

There is time to return to the Lord; but let's not miss our opportunity because God didn't appear as we expected.

Amen.