

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday in Lent, March 20, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 145, 61:1-2, 278, 419, 54

Lessons: Psalm 118, Philippians 3:17-4:1, Matthew 23: 1-39.

Sermon Text: Luke 13:31-35.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

One of the two incidents recorded in this short section of Luke's gospel has no parallel passages. That is the unusual passage in which Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod wants to kill him. The other incident is one in which Jesus spoke words of great sorrow over the city of Jerusalem. Through the words of our text, we see that

JESUS' DESTINY IN JERUSALEM DRAWS CLOSER

- 1. The warning against Herod (Herod Antipas).**
- 2. A cry of sorrow over Jerusalem.**

Herod Antipas was now the ruler over the provinces of Galilee as well as Perea – an area east of the Jordan River. He was one of the surviving sons of Herod the Great, the man who tried to murder Jesus as an infant in Bethlehem. The advice of the Pharisees that Jesus leave this place tells us that Jesus was still traveling through one of these two provinces.

Why some of the Pharisees would come to Jesus with this warning has been variously interpreted. Perhaps their advice had the evil intention of speeding Jesus on to Jerusalem where he would meet with death. One of the better ideas seems to be that Herod himself had sent this warning to Jesus to try to intimidate him. This is the Herod who beheaded John the Baptist, and because some of the people seemed to think that Jesus was John come back to life, Herod may have feared Jesus, or at least been superstitiously afraid of him. The people regarded John as a prophet, and surely were angry with Herod for murdering John.

Jesus was still in the territory of Herod Antipas, and Herod had an evil will and possibly a guilty conscience for executing John the Baptist. At that time, we read that he ***“was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her”***(Mark 6:26) – “her” being the daughter of Herodias when she asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

Whether Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected or not, He was in the way. Of course he was not John come back to life. He was the Redeemer, the Messiah. As one Bible scholar states it: "In every work of Jesus [Herod] saw the hand of John the Baptist extended from the grave toward him; in every word concerning the Judgment that Jesus uttered he heard again the voice of John: Thou murderer of prophets!"

Perhaps Herod had sent the Pharisees to Jesus with this warning to get him out of his territory, even though previously in Luke 9 we are told that Herod tried to see Jesus.

At any rate, it is likely that both Herod and the Pharisees hoped to intimidate Jesus and get him out of their territory. But this warning to ‘Go away from here, because Herod wants to kill you’, made no impression on

Jesus. A threat of this kind could not make Jesus cease the work of His ministry. ***“He replied, ‘Go tell that fox, ‘I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’ In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day--for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!’”*** He answers, telling the Pharisees to go and take His return message to Herod. Jesus calls Herod a fox, both on account of his crafty, cruel disposition, and because of the fact that he had become a fox, a destroyer, in the vineyard of the Lord. The threat had no effect whatever upon Jesus. The term ‘fox’ was used by Jewish rabbis as an epithet for a crafty or sly person.

Herod could not force the Prophet of Galilee to yield. Jesus had work to do, and that work would be done. He must continue to cast out demons and to cure sicknesses as He has done up until now, for the time set in the counsel of God for his sacrificial death is near. Then, according to His own will, at the time appointed by Him, the end will come. That was the obligation resting upon Him, and that He must carry out.

Regardless of why the Pharisees came to Jesus with this warning, Jesus does not heed the warning. Rather he sends the Pharisees back to Herod with the message that he will continue his work as a servant of the Lord until he reaches his goal. ***“I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.”*** Jesus must continue to fight the ruler of demons, Satan himself, until Satan is finally conquered on the day of resurrection in Jerusalem. Jesus must continue to heal people of their earthly diseases, and more importantly, heal people of the leprosy of sin.

Herod is not the one who will determine the end of Jesus’ life. Jesus knows that he will die where true prophets have died before: in Jerusalem. ***“In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day--for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!”*** And He adds, with bitter sorrow, that He must die in Jerusalem, the place where prophets had been murdered. Two chapters earlier in Luke Jesus said ***“Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world.”*** Luke 11:50

It is God's will that Jesus’ career and life shall end in Jerusalem.

Jesus is speaking figuratively when he says that his goal will be reached on the third day. Christians cannot help but see this as a reference to his resurrection on the third day. It was on the day of resurrection that Jesus accomplished the victory over death and the devil, and all sin.

How sad that Jesus should die in Jerusalem! But he gives another warning: ***“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.”*** Jesus wanted to show his love to all in Jerusalem. He wanted to gather them as believers and protect them. But they were not willing.

Matthew records nearly identical words spoken by Jesus against Jerusalem when he had already entered that city, as you heard in our Gospel lesson.

Luke places this sad lament of Jesus at this point, and it is more than likely that Jesus spoke these words and similar ones more than once. The city of Jerusalem, the capital of the nation, the location for centuries of God’s temple, which should have been the leader in welcoming the prophets of the Lord and showing them every honor, had gotten a different, terribly bad reputation. Over the centuries the city had gotten the reputation as a place to stone the prophets and kill the messengers of the Lord. Jesus Himself had tried, with all the love he could show as Savior, to gather the people of the city to Him, to bring them the joyful assurance of their redemption through His blood. His concern for the residents of this city had been constant during all the years of His ministry. After his triumphant entry into Jerusalem – on a donkey on Palm Sunday – he again expresses that concern, like that of a brooding hen anxiously concerned about the welfare of her chicks.

He clearly wanted to gather the inhabitants of that city underneath his protecting wing. Jesus is the Son of the true God ***"who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."*** 1 Timothy 2:4 All Christians today can take warning from these words of Jesus. Jerusalem had had the message of the prophets for centuries, and yet they – many of its residents – rejected the gospel in the Old Testament which pointed to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And now that Jesus Christ had come into the flesh to complete his work of redemption, they would also reject him. We, who have had the gospel all our lives, and perhaps even for generations, can easily fall into the same sin of rejection, just because we have had it for so long and it seems so familiar. Beware lest the truth and purity of the Gospel slip away!

Speaking directly to the residents of the city, Jesus utters these sad words ***"you were not willing!"*** The King James Version seems even stronger: ***"and ye would not!"*** ***"The house"*** which Jesus says ***"is left desolate"*** may refer to the spiritual bankruptcy of the temple and its worship, which would exist in Jerusalem for only another 40 years. It is easy to read it as a veiled reference to the coming destruction of the city by the Romans, which occurred in 70 A.D.

And so they brought their punishment upon themselves, really in multiple ways: First, their dwelling, the city of Jerusalem, was destroyed by the Romans and left desolate barely four decades later. Secondly, they will not see Christ again until the day when He returns in His glory, and when even His enemies, who will then be completely confounded, will have to confess that Jesus is Lord. One writer said ***"Then their lips, for the chattering of their teeth [in fear], will hardly be able to form the words, and their heart will utter curses ...; but they will have to acknowledge Him whom they killed as the Lord of all."***

Jesus' weeping teaches us something very important about our God. His love for us is not lost. He wants Jerusalem to be his bride. Listen to John in Revelation 21:1-2: ***"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."*** So he courts her and woos her and does all he can to win her heart. He wants her to want to marry him. But when she is not willing, he does not force her. God will never force himself on his bride, the holy Christian Church. Instead he stands there helpless and heartbroken. To the world this looks like weakness and foolishness. But God is love, and he will not violate his beloved. His reluctance to forcing people to believe when he is seeking love has been called weakness, but is the true power in the wisdom of God. ***"For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."*** 1 Corinthians 1:25

After centuries of expectant waiting, John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus, and Jesus came in fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. Only three and one-half years later, Jesus says ***"Look, your house is left to you desolate."***

Jesus closes his message to Jerusalem with words quoted from Psalm 118:26 and used by the Jews as part of their liturgy on great festival dates. Jesus' words look forward to the day when all believers will echo the hymn of the Palm Sunday crowd, ***"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."*** Jesus' disciples would shout these very words when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem as the humble King on Palm Sunday. In a much broader sense they refer to Jesus' final advent, his coming to judge the living and the dead. That's when all the world will recognize Jesus as the one who comes in the name of the Lord, not as a Savior but as a Judge.

You know what this is leading up to. It is all leading up to Jesus' suffering and death on the cross to save you from your sins. Believe this and eternal life is yours! Amen.