

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Lent 2C  
March 13, 2022  
Luke 13:31-35  
How to Handle a Death Threat

“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! 35 Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'” (Luke 13:34-35 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

God sent a preacher to His people to proclaim His Word, to call the people back to Himself, to call them to repentance lest the Lord's judgment come upon them. And the leaders of the people didn't like what they heard. The preacher had faithfully spoken what God had given him to say and it was devastating. It wasn't warm and fuzzy. It didn't approve of and embrace their idolatry, their deceptions, their self-chosen ways. What they valued most, their beloved Jerusalem, was going to be destroyed. And they wanted to kill him for saying such things. How dare he speak thus against their beloved city? But their threats didn't deter him from his task. His life was in the hands of the Lord God. And the preacher's name was Jeremiah.

Of course, all that happened to Jeremiah — the rejection of God's Word calling for repentance and the threats on his life — pointed ahead and foreshadowed the cross and Passion of Christ Jesus, who suffered the judgment of God for the redemption of all people. For God's people didn't listen to Jesus either. Though Jesus had come for their salvation, the Pharisees opposed Him almost from the beginning.

Today we hear those Pharisees deliver a death threat. And whether Herod really was out to kill Jesus or not, they merely wanted Jesus gone – one way or another. But Jesus would not be deterred. He remained focused on His task and His goal. Men had tried to kill Him before, but He had simply walked away. So Jesus tells the Pharisees that they could tell that sly, old Herod that He was going to continue doing what He was doing and that He wouldn't stop until He had accomplished all He had come to do. He wouldn't be rushed or scared off by anyone, including Herod. Jesus was going to continue to preach, heal, and drive out demons day by day until His Father deemed the time was right for His Son to die. And neither Satan, nor Herod, nor the Pharisees, nor anyone else could, or would, keep Jesus from finishing His task at the time and place appointed by His Father.

And when Jesus remarked that "no prophet can die outside Jerusalem," He was telling them that He was going to Jerusalem and that He would die there. Indeed, throughout Israel's history God's prophetic preachers had been killed in Jerusalem. Time after time the people rejected God's Word. They truly had mistreated and killed many prophets. They rejected the prophets'

message, and thereby rejected God Himself. And now they were rejecting the greatest Prophet and ignoring the message He proclaimed.

So Jesus laments that as often as He had tried to gather the people together to protect them and save them, they rebelled and refused to be gathered together. It's not that Jesus stopped trying, but that they continually rejected Jesus. In fact, this entire chapter of Luke shows Jesus calling the people to repentance and warning them of the consequences if they don't repent. He makes it quite clear that those who do not repent will perish. Indeed, Jesus "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). He took no delight "in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 18:32; 33:11). Yet He was rejected again and again.

There's a story told about a hen house that burst into flames after being struck by lightning. "The volunteer fire department could not save the hen house. As the farmer poked through the ashes he found the charred carcass of a hen. But underneath the blackened carcass were six chicks who had survived the fire. The mother hen had 'gathered her chicks under her wings.' She had died so they might live." This illustrates what Jesus does for us. He gathers us together through the working of the Holy Spirit to keep us safe under His outstretched arms on the cross. He also died that we might live. But those that refuse to be gathered and run away from Christ will perish.

Now during Lent it is likely that Jesus' final words in our text cause many of us to think about His entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. But Jesus is addressing His enemies, the Pharisees. He tells them that they would not see Him until the time comes when they say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'" On Palm Sunday, the people that lined the street were the pilgrims that had come to Jerusalem for the Passover. The leaders certainly didn't praise Jesus that day! But on the Last Day, when Jesus returns to gather His children together, everyone will recognize Jesus as the one "who comes in the name of the Lord." And those who believe that Christ came to save them from their sins will rejoice in that day. Those who reject Him will still acknowledge Him but to their great shame and horror.

We, too, are often like Jerusalem. We, too, reject God's prophets that He sends to us. We do that by mistreating or abusing the pastor God has given to us or by staying away from him and avoiding him. We often break the Third Commandment when we "despise preaching and His Word" by not gladly attending services in His House, not using the Word and Sacraments, or by using them negligently or carelessly. We refuse to diligently read and study His Word. This ought not to be.

Yet, Jesus continues to call us and enlighten us with His gifts, Baptism, Absolution, the Lord's Supper, and preaching. And, as God continually sent the prophets to the Jews, He continues to do the same for us by sending pastors who seek to gather us together to keep us in the one true faith by the preaching of the Gospel, so that we may have life with Him. Jesus never gives up. Like the Energizer bunny who keeps going and going and going, or like Wile E. Coyote who, no matter how many times he fails to capture the Roadrunner, continues to try. His persistence

is amazing. And so it is with Jesus. Even though He had been rejected everywhere He had been, He continued to care about His children. He continued to go down the road laid out for Him by His Father. He resisted Satan's temptations and Herod's death threat by once again demonstrating His firm trust in His Father's will and His resolve to finish the course that had been laid out for Him. And, no matter how often He had been rejected, He never failed to love and care for all people. For He was going to die for them and for us. And He didn't want any of them or us to be lost. And it greatly saddens Him when even one is lost.

You and I have been born under a death threat. Because of our sin we deserve to die. But because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we need not fear it. Although in many ways we stubbornly resist, in even more ways our sorrowing and persistent Savior continues to "call, gather, and enlighten" us by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. He continues to minister to us by casting out demons, healing the fatal disease of sin, and gathering us to Himself. And His work in us will be complete on our "third day"—the day of our resurrection. God grant that when Christ returns, we will rejoice to say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.