

SLD 03.04.07 2nd Lent
Emory Presbyterian Church
Luke 13:31-35
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“All In God’s Time”

On this second Sunday of Lent, the Gospel of Luke treats us to Jesus with an attitude. Myself, I like a Savior with a little spunk, a Messiah with a little moxie. In my opinion, the whole “Lady with a Beard” look has never really suited Jesus; it’s certainly never suited me for him. Knowing what I know about sheep, I’ve never even been a real fan of the shepherd metaphor. I far prefer when Jesus buckles down and takes care of business like a real...human being.

And if there’s anything Jesus is in today’s text, it’s pistol real. And poignant real, too, but we’ll get to that.

Some Pharisees show up and warn Jesus to get moving because Herod’s out to kill him. Now these are good guy Pharisees, an anomaly in the gospels; ones who apparently care about Jesus. Or maybe they’re not; maybe they’re just taunting Jesus to see the look of fear on his face when they let him know his number is up with Herod.

In either case, Jesus’ response reveals his emotional independence of both them and Herod: “You go tell that fox for me....”

I love it.

You tell that fox for me...I’ll get to Jerusalem when God is good and ready for me to. Meanwhile , I got things to do, hear?”

He looks at his appointment book.

“Next couple days...let’s see...I got 3 exorcisms – wait – I forgot about ‘Legion’ – make that *four* exorcisms, six miracles, a dinner party with you guys and your attorneys,

a major march and sit-in with regional sinners and tax collectors... which gets us to Tuesday when, I'm pretty sure – Peter, correct me if I'm wrong but don't we have that story telling session with the paradoxical parables and what not? Yeah, I thought so.

“So listen, y'all go tell Harry he's just gonna have to wait 'til I get to Jerusalem to do away with me. And hey, tell him I apologize for any inconvenience, hear? But he knows as well as I do that you just don't be killing prophets outside of Jerusalem. He *knows* that.”

Apparently unflappable, Jesus delivers this little repartee with the cool confidence and moral authority of John Wayne, and I like his chutzpah. Ain't nothing gonna happen until God's ready for it to happen, and that's all there is to it. God will do what God will do when God wants to do it, and not even King Herod himself can put any crimps in the divine plan.

Never mind Herod's already beheaded John the Baptist for his upstart behavior. Never mind people are saying that Jesus might be John the Baptist come back from the dead, and Herod's beginning to believe them. Jesus knows where he's going to die, and when, and it's just not going to happen before God's ready.

Clearly Jesus refuses to operate on any time table besides God's – not the Pharisees', which is based on fear, nor Herod's, which is based on power, nor even yours or mine, which is based on whatever we happen to want or need from Jesus. Fully individuated, from the time Jesus sets his face toward the Jerusalem in chapter 9 of Luke until he finally gets there at the end of chapter 19, neither his enemies nor his followers have any influence whatsoever to distract him from his destiny. Jesus is on a journey to the cross and beyond, and neither Herod, nor the crowd, nor his disciples,

can block his Way. Truly the days are drawing near for Jesus to be “taken up” (9:51) and he “must be on his way” (13:33) but only in God’s time.

Oh, for such confidence in, and surrender to, the power of divine will and the grace of divine timing! A model for us during our own Lenten journey to the cross.

But wait! What’s happening?

“Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem!” cries Jesus. *Cries* Jesus? Suddenly John Wayne morphs into Jimmy Stewart, or maybe Judy Garland, as Jesus cries out in anguish. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired, have I yearned, to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

A poignant speech, full of pathos and tenderness, exasperation and resignation – and a far cry from Jesus’ earlier swaggering retort. Hopefully the Pharisees have already grumbled their way back to the synagogue before Jesus changes gears altogether.

But what just happened? Why the sudden meltdown? What became of Jesus’ cool confidence? His bow-legged, wild west swagger? Did the full import of the Pharisees’ warning suddenly hit him, the raw reality of his own impending death? Is he suddenly full of fear? Or is it grief?

The concern Jesus so poignantly expressed is not for himself but for those he has failed to influence. The time God has given him on earth is limited and it is soon to end, as will his personal opportunity to grasp his people by the heart and teach them about the Kingdom of God.

“I longed to gather you in but you were not willing!”

Jerusalem is nearing, the cross is in view, and time is growing short and Jesus grieves the cluelessness of the crowd and the thick-headedness of his disciples. Like a parent whose kid has grown up and moved out on his own, Jesus frets over the mess his followers are making of their lives, even while recognizing their independence and free will.

“See, your house is left to you. Your house and your job, your families and your studies, your assets and your investments - all your affairs, are left to you. How often I have wanted to protect you from yourselves, from your choices, your mistakes, your illusions. But you’re all grown up now, with options and opinions and a will of your own. So your affairs are left to you, of course, but I grieve the choices you make. Mourn when you don’t see me for who I am. Weep when you miss the reason I was sent. Or worse, when you no longer think of me at all.”

It’s a deeply poignant, deeply personal lament, this outburst of Jesus’ – nothing cool, calm or collected about it. What prompts Jesus’ descent into his grieving heart, from the heights of his arms length, indignant resistance to external authority, to the depths of the tenderest of maternal sentiments, as mother for her wayward child, a hen for its wandering chicks? Embedded in the sovereignty of God’s power, the intimacy, the poignancy, of divine compassion . Perhaps an even stronger lesson for our personal Lenten journeys.

Curiously, this same lament of Jesus’ appears in the gospel of Matthew though much later in Jesus’ journey, well after he’s arrived in Jerusalem and much closer to his death. Why does Luke show Jesus melting down so much earlier in his Lenten journey? One scholar suggests it’s to give his followers more time on their Lenten

journeys. More time to recognize Jesus. More time to repent. More time to prepare for Jesus' death, and perhaps, our own. More time to cultivate enough confidence in God's power and compassion to allow ourselves to be gathered in to Jesus, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.

Jesus says, "You will not see me or know me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'" In Matthew, that's on Palm Sunday, before Jesus enters Jerusalem. In Luke, it's at the foot of the cross. In today's service, it's when we gather at the Lord's table. When will that time come for you and me? All, I suppose, in God's time.

To the glory of God. Amen.