

**SERMON Second Sunday in Lent, March 16th, 2024, Luke 13: 31-35
Emmanuel Lutheran in Lancaster, Pa. Rev. Timothy W. Sadler**

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

Jerusalem! Jerusalem! The city that kills prophets and stones those who are sent to it.”

A lament wrung from the heart of Jesus, who is making a journey that will end in this city. These two things are woven together:

- 1) Jerusalem and
- 2) The destiny that awaits Jesus.

Jerusalem is a city filled with people of good intentions who will end up participating—one way or another—in the death of Jesus. Not everyone will physically nail Jesus to the Cross, but they will somehow be part of that act of destruction.

People will encounter the presence of the living Lord, and each one will need to decide how they will respond to that presence.

Jesus uses a very powerful example of the longing God has to care for God’s people. Jesus says, “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.”

Why, we wonder, would people not want to be gathered under the wings of this incredible Lord?

A hen opens her wings to embrace her children close to her side, to offer them protection and warmth and safety. But there’s so much more to it than that, it’s not quite as simple as it seems—and maybe that’s why people resisted.

Being gathered under the wings of Jesus says something about our relationship with God. It implies a belonging, a connection to...and a truth that wayward chicks often find hard to accept, that the mother hen knows better than the chicks what they need.

And if the chicks want to receive all that the mother hen has to offer, they must listen to the mother hen. If they decide to go off on their own, they are unprotected, vulnerable, without direction, lost.

When you know you’re connected to someone who is compassionate, wiser, and more powerful than you, you’d be foolish not to listen.

The Gospel lesson begins with the Pharisees coming up to Jesus to give a warning about Herod. We can’t tell from the lesson if they’re sincere or not. In most Gospel stories, the Pharisees don’t necessarily oppose Jesus.

They’re just uncomfortable around Jesus, and when you’re uncomfortable with someone, neither do you fully embrace that person. Neither do you run under the wings of that person for protection and guidance and love.

Jesus listens to their warning, for it confronts Jesus with a decision—will Jesus allow the ministry, the purpose for which Jesus was sent, to be influenced by a force other than God?

Remember last week we talked of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. That was a struggle with Satan that clarified Jesus' purpose and further strengthened the resolve of Jesus to do nothing except that which God would give Jesus to do.

Here's where the rubber hits the road. Here's where a decision made in the wilderness now touches the reality of everyday life. And it will have consequences that ripple out into time.

Something like Abraham's choice when God called Abraham out of the safety of everything, he knew and set him on a journey, a journey in which Abraham knew neither the route nor the destination.

This is the choice that confronts us...the same choice that now confronts Jesus: will Jesus play it safe or will Jesus continue to allow God to lead, without any guarantees except that God is present and leading Jesus every step of the way.

Jesus' answer is clear. Jesus will not be influenced by the likes of Herod. Jesus also makes a statement about the divine authority that rests within Jesus: Jesus is casting out demons and performing cures.

And then Jesus says: "I MUST be on my way."
And here is where the Church who bears the name of Jesus Christ need to listen very carefully:

The content of Jesus' mission---what it's all about and how it will take shape---comes only from God. The timing of Jesus' mission also comes only from God. It's God who determines where Jesus must go and when Jesus' must go there.

It's God who determines what activities and actions make up the ministry of Jesus. No one else—not even King Herod—has the authority to tell Jesus how to follow God.

And Jesus must go to Jerusalem.

The lament that Jesus makes over Jerusalem is words of anguish and regret about a people who will not hear the word of God. But this lament is also an indictment. It both challenges and warns the people of God.

If they refuse to embrace the presence and ministry of Jesus, they have no future. If you don't live God's will for your life, then you're simply existing.

That's the really sad and terrible thing about this: God's people have a choice, and, in this instance, they will choose other than new life. Because Jesus comes to them in a way that is different than what they expected, they can't accept Jesus, and the new life Jesus brings.

As we struggle in our own journey to the Cross, these words of Luke join forces with the words from last Sunday of Jesus temptation in the wilderness. Once again, we are challenged:

Who will set the agenda for us—we the people of God at the corner of Pine and Walnut in Lancaster, PA? Is it the foxes of the world—things like the economy, social customs, human traditions, political influence, personal opinion, or even—indifference?

What are things that threaten to drive us off course, to confuse our way, and make it hard to decide together how Jesus is calling us forth to new life?

To whom or to what do we give final authority in our lives? AND how do we—like the people of Jerusalem, want to avoid having Jesus gather us under the wings of transformation and life?

What do we fear more:

The power of Herod to hold us back, or the power of Jesus to make us new?

We know from how the story unfolds, that everyone—in the end—will run away from Jesus.

-The Pharisees because they can't imagine living out their faith any differently than the way they always have.

-The disciples will run away because –they can't let go of their own ideas of how Jesus should go about doing the ministry of God. They catch glimpses here and there but are much too afraid to follow their hearts and convictions.

I guess the amazing thing is that Jesus continues the journey to the Cross in spite of the unwillingness of God's people to be caught in that incredible embrace of love. We all fight it in some way:

Emotionally,
Spiritually,
Psychologically, and
Physically.

We all hold back parts of our lives and say, not here, Lord. Here you cannot rule.

Nevertheless, Jesus continues the journey to the Cross, for God will never give up on the people God created with hope and who God continues to guide in mercy.

In Jesus, God worked in very powerful, life-giving ways to bring every promise to fulfillment, and God did that for every person who has ever, at one time or another, resisted Jesus' embrace of love.

It is a frightening thing sometimes to walk more fully into Christ's embrace, for we know that it will ask of us all we have to give, even our very lives.

But unless we surrender ourselves completely, we will never know the abundant life that God longs to give us.

In this Lenten season, I pray we have the courage to take the steps that will bring us more firmly into God's Easter embrace of joy. AMEN.

Children, Youth, and Young at Heart Story

Under His Wing

Theme

God loves and cares for His children.

Object

Song: "Five Little Ducks;" something to play the song on

Scripture

Luke 13:31-35

This morning we're going to sing a song together. Some of you may know the song; it's called "Five Little Ducks." There is a part of the song where the mother duck says, "quack, quack, quack, quack." When you hear that part, let's all sing together and quack our hands. (Show kids how to make beaks with their hands.)

Five Little Ducks:

Five little ducks went out one day,
Over the hill and far away;
Mother duck said, "Quack, quack, quack, quack." (Quack hands.)
But only four little ducks came back.

Four little ducks went out one day,
Over the hill and far away;
Mother duck said, "Quack, quack, quack, quack." (Quack hands.)
But only three little ducks came back.

Three little ducks went out one day,
Over the hill and far away;
Mother duck said, "Quack, quack, quack, quack." (Quack hands.)
But only two little ducks came back.

Two little ducks went out one day,
Over the hill and far away;
Mother duck said, "Quack, quack, quack, quack." (Quack hands.)
But only one little duck came back.

One little duck went out one day,
Over the hill and far away;
Mother duck said, "Quack, quack, quack, quack." (Quack hands.)
But none of the five little ducks came back.

Sad mother duck went out one day,
Over the hill and far away;
The sad mother duck said "Quack, quack, quack, quack." (Quack hands.)
And all of the five little ducks came back.

>This song is just so sweet! It shows how much the mother duck loved her little ones. Each time the little ducks went out, one of them got lost. Finally, the mother duck had lost all of her little ones -- but she never gave up -- she kept calling them! Do you think mother duck would have been satisfied if one, two, three, or even four of the little ducks had come back? I don't think so. I think mother duck would have kept calling, "Quack, quack, quack, quack, quack," until "ALL five of the little ducks came back!"

>This story is a lot like the love that Jesus has for His children. The Bible tells us that one day Jesus looked over the city of Jerusalem and wept. He said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."

>Jesus was crying out in sadness over Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a very special place for God's chosen people. But when Jesus came, the people of Jerusalem rejected Him. Jesus longed for His children to turn from their ways and come to Him. He promised a blessing for those who would accept Him. We're promised that same blessing today. Like a mother hen, Jesus calls His children to come to Him so that He can shelter and protect them.

>Even though Jerusalem rejected Jesus, He never stopped calling His children. If only SOME of Jesus' children come back, He won't stop calling. If ALMOST all of His children come to Him, He still won't stop calling. The Bible teaches us that Jesus loves His children so much that He won't stop calling until ALL of His children come back. He may be calling some of you today.

Let us pray: Dear Jesus, thank You for loving us so much that You keep calling us to come to You. Amen.

Amen.

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