

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Second Sunday in Lent - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalm 27

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

31At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to [Jesus,] “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” 32He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’” 34Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

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

Jerusalem

Good morning! David Schnasa Jacobsen, the professor of the Practice of Homiletics and director of the Homiletical Theology Project at the School of Theology at Boston University, writes that *“The Gospel lection for this Sunday represents a challenge for preachers on several levels.”*¹ That’s the understatement of the century. When I first read the Gospel earlier this week, I just put the whole thing out of my mind, I wasn’t even ready to begin thinking through what my sermon should look like. After my sermon last week I decided against going with the mother hen language in the story, important as it is. That left me with this confusing story of Herod the fox and Jerusalem killing prophets... wonderful!

I’ll point out a few things that are interesting: the first is that everywhere else in the Gospel of Luke where the pharisees are working against Jesus, the text goes out of its way to make it known. In this story, it doesn’t. We can often portray the pharisees as the bad guys in the Gospel stories, but it just isn’t true. What we have before us today is those pharisees actually helping Jesus! “Get out of here man!, Herod is going to kill you if you don’t get out of here!” This is what prompts Jesus’ interesting speech. He tells the pharisee’s to run and tell Herod to cool his jets... Herod... the person appointed by the Roman Empire to rule over the region. I sincerely doubt that the pharisees ran off to go tell him what Jesus said, he doesn’t seem to be the type of guy who takes that type of thing easily.

¹https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3990

If King Herod is the fox, then Jesus is the hen protecting her brood. It's one of the wonderful images we have in the text that uses female imagery for God. It's a nice reminder that God has no gender, God is just God. The picture of a mother protecting her children from physical danger is one of the most powerful images one can imagine. Women are tough, and anyone who has ever threatened a woman's children can tell you just how true that is.

The focus of the story, and the focus of this season of Lent is the holy city: Jerusalem. "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!*," Jesus says. You see, we know of the prophets in the Bible that were faithful after the fact. But throughout the history of Israel it was common for there to be a variety of different prophets, all proclaiming different things. Unfortunately, it was the ones who said things that the king liked that got to stick around. When a prophet challenged the ruling authority they could often be killed. And so Jerusalem, the ancient ruling seat of the region, was where that power was most evident.

What David Schnasa Jacobsen helpfully points out is that while Jesus may indeed be marching to his death, it's by his own choice and freewill.² He isn't being marched as a prisoner, broken and defeated. When he arrives in Jerusalem it will be to his own agenda. Regardless of what happens, God is in control.

Which brings us to our second reading from Philippians. In a world full of grey areas, Paul outlines a clear picture of life as a Christian and life as an enemy of the cross. We don't know who specially Paul is talking about in the community at Philippi, but

² https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3990

Edward Pillar does a good job of helping us understand what being an enemy of the cross looks like.

“To be an enemy of the cross is to live on a path that would not be familiar to the Lord Jesus.” It follows a certain set of behaviors: *“self-preservation... self-satisfaction... self-obsession”* Their focus is on earthly things and persevering themselves.³ This is not the life to which you have been called to. During the season of Lent we meet on Wednesday evenings for what I call “soup, study, and service.” We have some dinner, study a book, and have a worship service. We’re reading a wonderful book titled *I Am a Church Member* and I was reminded of a quote from the introduction. *“God did not give us local churches to become country clubs where membership means we have privileges and perks. He placed us in churches to serve, to care for others, to pray for leaders, to learn, to teach, to give, and, in some cases, to die for the sake of the gospel.”*⁴

Are you ready to die for your faith? The victims of the shooting in New Zealand this past week didn’t have the opportunity to make that choice, it was taken away from them along with their lives. So now we sit here, with another 50 dead at the hands of enemies of the cross. Make no mistake, anyone who murders another innocent worshiper, regardless of religion, is an enemy of the cross.

I was formally diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder when I was in seminary. And one of the things that I will often do when approaching a new thing or experience that I know nothing about is to be afraid. Some people can just jump into a task, but I become very aware of everything that could go wrong. My mind keeps

³https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3995

⁴ Rainer, Thom S. *I Am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference*. Nashville, Tenn: B & H Pub. Group, 2013. p. 6.

spinning and it seems like I'll never understand whatever it is that I want to know more about, and I NEED to know the perfect and exact right way to do the job. I become more and more overwhelmed, which strangely helps to drive me right into more learning about whatever it is that I'm attempting. I literally become obsessed with whatever the topic is and after a length of time, somewhere between a week or a month, I emerge for the other side often knowing a great deal about whatever I was so afraid of in the first place. What was once scary and intimidating no longer seems that way.

We need to stop reacting from our sense of fear. If my OCD has taught me anything it's that when my mind is telling me to run away, I need to dive deeper. Being a Christian means diving deeper into the love of God. The opposite of an enemy of the cross, Edward Pillar argues, is a friend of the cross.⁵ That is the life we are called to. Being a friend to the cross of Jesus Christ means acting in love. And by love I don't mean some mushy emotion that says a whole lot but does very little. I'm talking about mother-hen type love here. Bishop Eaton, the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, released the following statement about the shooting in Christchurch: *"Together with our ecumenical and inter-religious partners, we stand shoulder to shoulder in condemning hatred, bigotry, racism and violence wherever and whenever it occurs. We do so because all people are made in the image of God. Therefore, as an act of neighborly love, I urge you to reach out to your Muslim neighbors today and in the days to come to ask how you might offer solidarity and*

⁵ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3995

support — joining whenever possible with other ecumenical and inter-religious neighbors.”⁶

Edward Pillar finishes his commentary with the following. *“Love is not passivity. Love is active — forgiveness, mercy, kindness. Love is creative — even in the midst of destruction. Love is relational, even as relationships are broken, and death ensues. Love is hopeful, even in the midst of despair. Love is trusting.”⁷* This is the life to which you have been called. Amen.

⁶ <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/7964>

⁷ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3995