**The Second Sunday in Lent**

**Sunday March 13, 2022**

**“Under God’s Wings” (Luke 13:31-35)**

This passage from Luke’s Gospel is set within a larger section called the *travel narrative.* It is the section of the Gospel where Jesus and his disciples take their final, fateful journey to Jerusalem. Along the way some Pharisees approached Jesus and warned him of Herod Antipas’ murderous intentions toward him (13:31). This, of course, raises some questions about the Pharisees’ exact motives in informing Jesus of this threat since they were clearly not on friendly terms with him. Their warning may have been aimed at trying to dissuade Jesus from continuing his messianic mission. In response to this death threat, they hoped that he would lay low and stop stirring things up. Jesus, of course, wasn’t going to be so easily deterred from his kingdom work. Undaunted by their warning, Jesus boldly declared his intention to carry on with the work that he was called to do. So, he ordered them to take this message back to Herod, “*Go tell that fox that I will keep on casting out demons and healing people today and tomorrow; and the third day I will accomplish my purpose*” (13:32). Jesus was following the path that God had mapped out for him and with dedicated resolve, he continued that fateful trip to Jerusalem. There, in the holy city he would accomplish his mission and meet the same fate as many of God’s messengers had before him.

 Jesus emphasized his resolve to complete his mission in Jerusalem with these words, “*Yes, today, tomorrow, and the next day I must proceed on my way. For it wouldn’t do for a prophet of God to be killed except in Jerusalem!*” (13:33). Jerusalem was the capital of the nation and so it represented the heartbeat of the nation. It would be there that the nation’s attitude toward Jesus would take its final shape. Many of God’s messengers had stood before the religious high court in Jerusalem and had come to bad ends. Jesus’ life would be no different. While Jesus was much more than a prophet, his central task of revealing God’s truth produced similar reactions among the people as in the past. Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus faced scepticism, indifference, resistance, and hostility. All this negativity would explode into the events of Passion Week. Jesus’s death, however, would not be in vain, for it would accomplish God’s redemptive purposes for humanity.

 Jesus was not swayed from his mission, even when he encountered threats, manipulation, resistance, and failure. He kept going in the face of opposition. His example inspires us to keep going when we face obstacles in accomplishing God’s mission. While this is a timely message for our congregation, I’d like to direct our attention on the next part of this passage. As Jesus reflected on Israel’s harsh treatment of the prophets, he uttered a sorrowful lament over Jerusalem. I can almost hear his sorrowful voice speaking these words, “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me”* (13:34).

 At first glance, we might be tempted to write off the relevance of these words for us since Jesus was clearly speaking to the people of Jerusalem. As he journeyed toward Jerusalem, he contemplated the long and sad history of God’s dealings with his people. Time and time again, God’s overtures of love were rejected by a rebellious and hardhearted people. Even’s God’s Son would be rejected and killed in Jerusalem. We might be tempted to stand in judgment over them and wonder why they didn’t listen to God and were so resistant to his will for them. Distancing ourselves from such behavior, we might even say, “*We’re not like that. If I’d been there, I would have been faithful to God.*” Yet this heart-breaking chronicle of humanity’s rebellion against God is as old as time itself. The grand narrative of Scripture depicting God’s dealings with humanity serves as a clear reminder and a solemn plea to us. *Don’t be hardhearted and rebellious toward God!*

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews referred to Israelite history in his appeals to his readers to keep their faith in God. Quoting Psalm 95:7-11, the writer exhorted his Christian readers to *listen* to God, saying, “*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested and tried me, though for forty years they saw what I did*” (Hebrews 3:7-9). The Exodus story and the account of the wilderness generation challenge all of us to act in the opposite way. Instead of rebelliousness and resistance, we are encouraged to have a deeper faith in God, to listen to his voice, and to obey his ways. The voices of the Old Testament prophets still cry out to us, calling us to forsake our rebellious ways, repent, and return to God. The Gospel narratives tell the tale of Jesus, the Son of God, whose ministry was met with a considerable amount of opposition from some very religious people. *Today, if we hear God’s voice, let’s not harden our hearts.*

 The good news is that our defiance toward God is met by his great love for us. Jesus declared, “*How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings*” (13:34). There are many beautiful images in the Bible that depict God’s love for us, but this picture of a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings vividly illustrates the depth of divine love. God is like a mother hen who desperately strives to gather her chicks under her protective wings. God wants to draw you, me, and everyone else to himself. Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem was an expression of his profound sorrow at humanity’s rejection of God’s loving embrace. There is nothing that hurts more than to offer love to someone and have that love rejected and spurned. Yet God patiently waits with his arms open wide, wanting to embrace a broken and hurting world.

 Like a mother hen tenderly gathering her brood under her wings, God desires to gather everyone under his wings. In this single verse, Jesus conveyed the depth of God’s love, longing, and heartbreak for his children. “How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, *but you wouldn’t let me*” (13:34). Time and time again, God reaches out to people with love and compassion, yet his overtures of love are often met with resistance and rejection. Again, we might be tempted to redirect the implications of this verse and place them upon others, such as those who don’t believe in Jesus. While this verse is applicable to them, we too need to think about Jesus’ words. Like a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings, God desires to gather us to himself, as individuals and as a congregation.

 God patiently waits for us with his arms open wide. How have we responded God’s loving embrace? With polite indifference, active resistance, or a stubborn desire to maintain control? Are we really willing to gathered under God’s wings*?* Are we willing to give up control of our lives and trust God completely?

**Questions for Reflection**

1. Use a journal this week and write out your reflections on one or more of the following questions:

 a. What are some of the reasons I fear giving my life completely to God?

 b. Which areas of my life am I most reluctant to surrender to God?

 c. In what ways have I experienced the heavy burden of trying to remain in control of my life?