

THE PROPHET'S COURSE

Luke 13:31-35

Second Sunday in Lent (Series C)

March 13, 2022

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The gospel lesson for the Second Sunday in Lent comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 13, verses 31 through 35. In this gospel lesson, Jesus gets a death threat, and his reaction to it is kind of strange. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 13, beginning at verse 31, we read in Jesus' name.

³¹ At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." ³² And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. ³³ Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.' ³⁴ 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 were not willing! 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!' "

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's talk about prophets. There are two basic things that prophets do. Do you know what they are? This is your quiz for today. What are the two things that every prophet, or at least almost every prophet does?

Here's the first one: every prophet speaks the Word of God. That's the basic job description of a prophet. They speak the Word of God. And they especially call people to repentance. We kind of have this idea that prophets predict the future. And some of them do, some of the time. But when we look at the preaching of the prophets in the Old Testament, most of their content is calling people to repentance. They call out sin, and they call people to turn from that sin, and seek the LORD's forgiveness. That's most of their preaching. When they do predict the future, they are either warning people of the disaster that will come if they do not repent, or they're making promises about the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ. All of this can be summarized as preaching repentance. And that's the first thing that every prophet does. They speak the Word of God, especially calling people to repentance.

The second one is a little more difficult to figure out. It happens to the prophets because of the first thing they do. They call people to repentance, and then this other thing typically follows. They suffer. Specifically, I mean persecution. And there might be a prophet or two here and there who escaped this, but if we think through the most famous prophets, like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Daniel, Elijah, John the Baptizer, and finally Jesus, they all have this thing in common. They spoke the Word of God, and they suffered for it.

So a job description for a prophet might look something like this: "Responsibilities: Speak the Word of God, and especially call people to repentance. Compensation: Suffering." And if a prophet asks about a retirement plan, the answer would be, "You won't be needing that."

This is what we see in both the Old Testament lesson and the Gospel lesson, which we just read. First I want to back up to the Old Testament lesson, which was from Jeremiah 26 (v. 8-15). This sets up the historical background for what Jesus says in *The Gospel of Luke*. So we'll give a little bit of our time to Jeremiah.

And I think it always helps to familiarize ourselves with the historical context when we step back into the Old Testament. Jeremiah was a prophet in Jerusalem about 600 years before Christ. This was a pretty low point in Israel's history. The northern part of Israel had already been conquered by the Assyrians, and the inhabitants were scattered all over the world. That happened a little more than a hundred years before Jeremiah's ministry. The kings in the north were all wicked, and they ignored the warnings of the prophets, so God sent a disaster upon them by the hands of the Assyrians. So all that was left during the ministry of Jeremiah was the tribe of Judah, the smaller tribe of Benjamin, and the priests, who came from the tribe of Levi. That was the Southern Kingdom, and it went by the name Judah.

Jeremiah was called as a prophet while Josiah was the king of Judah (1:1-2). And Josiah was a good king. Actually, that's not quite right. Josiah was a very good king. But his sons and grandsons were not. They were foolish, and they were wicked. So following Josiah's death, things went downhill very, very fast. Jeremiah warned the nation about the coming disaster. Politically, they faced threats from both Egypt and Babylon. Jeremiah warned them that if they did not repent, disaster would come upon the entire nation.

The passage we read from chapter 26 takes place early in the reign of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah (26:1). So this is shortly after Josiah's death. Jeremiah goes to the temple in Jerusalem and warns that if the people of Judah do not turn back from their evil ways, "This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant" (26:9). The house he spoke of was the temple, and the city he spoke of was Jerusalem. If the people did not repent, God would allow the entire city, including his temple, to be destroyed. He said it would be like Shiloh.

Now we have to back up even farther in the Old Testament, to about 1050 BC. Shiloh is where the tabernacle was set up during the period of the judges. That is, before the temple was built in Jerusalem, and before Israel even had kings. You might remember the story of Samuel, how when he was a boy, the LORD called him and spoke to him in the middle of the night while he was lying down in the tabernacle. That was at Shiloh. The tabernacle was like the temple, except it was a tent instead of a stone building. And they kept the Ark of the Covenant in this tent. The Ark of the Covenant was the throne of God. It was like a fancy golden chest, and it's where God promised to dwell with the people.

Anyway, there was this one time when Israel was going into battle against the Philistines. And they wanted some extra ... luck, I suppose you could call it, so they took the Ark of the Covenant with them. They lost the battle anyway. Actually, they got slaughtered, and the ark was captured. They thought having the ark with them would mean God was on their side. It didn't work. They did eventually get the ark back, though.

Now back to Jeremiah. Jeremiah compares Jerusalem and the temple to Shiloh and the tabernacle. Many of the people in Jerusalem, including the priests and so-called prophets, were kind of superstitious about the temple and the Ark of the Covenant. Here's the difference between superstition and religion, and I mean the good kind of religion: True religion trusts in the one true God and is concerned about obedience to him. Superstition, on the other hand, trusts in certain things or the performance of rituals. So in superstition, you can believe whatever you want and do whatever you want, so long as you say the magic words and perform certain rituals

with certain sacred objects. Superstition is not true faith. We can even be superstitious about things God gives to us, such as the sacraments. If we think our doing of these things protects us, that's not true faith. And that's different than trusting the promise of God attached to these things. When we trust the promise of God, we are really trusting in God, not the things.

The priests and so-called prophets in Jerusalem were superstitious about the temple and the Ark of the Covenant. They thought there was a spiritual power about these objects that would protect them. But it's bad luck to be superstitious. God was not pleased with them, because their deeds were evil, and they did not trust the one true God.

Jeremiah called them repent. He spoke against the city of Jerusalem and even the LORD's temple. The priests and so-called prophets were so angry that they wanted to kill Jeremiah. But Jeremiah was bold and courageous. He repeats his warning, and then he basically says, "Go ahead. Kill me if you want to. Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves" (26:14-15).

Jeremiah was a true prophet. He spoke the Word of God. He called the people to repent. And he was willing to die for it. If you read the rest of the story, you'll see that cooler heads prevailed, and Jeremiah was not given early retirement, at least not yet. God had more prophesying for him to do, which meant he also had more suffering to endure. And, in the end, the people did not listen, and the entire city of Jerusalem, including the temple, was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Furthermore, the Ark of the Covenant was taken away and remains unaccounted for to this day.

Now for the gospel lesson, and the greatest prophet: Jesus.

Jesus is on a journey. He is on a journey to Jerusalem and the cross. We talked about this a couple weeks ago regarding Jesus' transfiguration. Jesus is on a journey from the middle of chapter 9, all the way through chapter 19, when he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Somewhere in the middle of this journey, some Pharisees come and warn Jesus that Herod wants to kill him. It's hard to say whether these Pharisees are friendly toward Jesus or hostile. In general, most of the encounters Jesus had with the Pharisees were hostile. However, there were some Pharisees who actually believed in Jesus. Nicodemus is the prime example, but there seem to be a few others as well.

It may be that they warn Jesus because they are honestly trying to protect him. But it's also possible that their intentions are evil. Maybe they just want Jesus out of their own region, so they're using Herod's plot to suit their own purposes. There's another possibility: it may be that they're making the whole thing up as part of their own plot to trap Jesus in Jerusalem. This idea actually makes good sense. In Jerusalem, after Jesus is arrested and handed over to Pilate, Herod finally gets to meet Jesus face-to-face. And Herod was glad about this. He had wanted to meet Jesus. Herod also doesn't find any reason to put Jesus to death. So we're supposed to believe that Herod wanted to kill Jesus, but then when Jesus is arrested and handed over to him, Herod doesn't want to kill him? I think it's more likely that the Pharisees are just trying to capture Jesus in Jerusalem.

This makes Jesus's response all the more interesting when he says, **"I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem"** (13:33). Contrary to what the Pharisees say, if Jesus stays where he is, he will not die. Even if Herod really is trying to kill him, and even if Herod does catch up to Jesus there, Jesus is not going to die there, because that is not the appointed place for him to die. People have tried to kill Jesus before, but it never works. It will only work at the appointed time in the

appointed place. The only scenario in which Jesus is actually going to die is if he continues on his journey to Jerusalem, and that is what Jesus insists on doing. That is what Jesus has intentionally been doing this entire journey. So he insists on continuing to Jerusalem.

According to Jesus, Jerusalem is where prophets go to die. But God keeps sending prophet after prophet. So there comes a point, especially by the time we get to Jesus, where God starts to look foolish. Why would you keep sending prophets, knowing that they will be rejected? And why would you send your only Son, knowing that he will be killed? The answer, at least in the case of the prophets, is that some of the people will hear the Word and repent. It always seems to be a minority, but God preserves a remnant through the ministry of these prophets. And the answer in the case of Jesus is that it's actually the whole point of him coming. His purpose is to be rejected and killed, and this is the reason he set his face toward Jerusalem. Despite Jerusalem's murderous opposition to Jesus, he goes there out of his love for them to be the sacrifice for their sins.

And I want you to notice how foolish this sounds, because it's the foolishness of this that highlights the love of God. When Jesus goes to the cross to die, he doesn't do it for good people. He doesn't do it for people who really deserve it, but are just down on their luck. He doesn't do it for people who have been pleading with him to deliver them from their sins. He does it for people who don't want it. He does it for people who are telling him that if he doesn't shut up about being the Son of God, they're going to kill him. He does it for people who don't think they need any forgiveness. Jesus does it for the people who don't deserve it. Think about this: Jesus offers himself as the sacrifice for the sins of people who want to kill him. He'll even pray, **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"** (23:34).

And he's grieved by the whole thing. He laments the fact that the people of Jerusalem will cry for his blood. But his concern is not that he's going to die; he knows that's what he has to do. He laments that these are lost souls. He doesn't mind dying for them, but as long as they persist in their unbelief, they will never enjoy the benefits of his sacrifice for them.

Here we see the compassion of God, who never desires that any should perish, for, even though their rebellion will work into God's plan to bring salvation to the entire world, Jesus still weeps over their rejection of him. He weeps, not for his sake, but for theirs. He doesn't mind dying for them. He just wants them to know what he is doing for them so that they might believe and live.

He feels like a mother hen, whose instinct is to gather her chicks under her wings, but they won't have it. Imagine how a mother hen would be if her chicks are running this way and that, willing to be anywhere but under her protection. That's how Jesus felt regarding Jerusalem. His concern was not for himself, but for them. So his emotional response is not anger, but sadness.

When we imagine how God must feel about our sins, we often project the emotion of anger onto him. But that's not what we see in this text. Anger is an appropriate response to sin, and God is capable of anger, but his wrath and anger over sin was poured out completely upon the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He does not continue to be angry over sin, and he is not angry over your sin.

But this is our natural tendency. We think, *Oh, I've really done it this time. God will never forgive me.* We make this error, because we think of God as a strict master instead of a tender Father. He is grieved by our sin and unbelief, not because he is angry, but because he is saddened by our wandering away from him. Do not think of God as a strict master whom you must earn

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salvation from. That is not God. Think of God as a tender Father who desires to forgive, protect, and provide, because that is who he is.

So when you sin, do not hide from God. This has been our natural tendency since the first sin. But you cannot hide from God, you can only pretend that you're pulling it off. Do not hide from God. God is saddened by our sin, because it is contrary to his good and gracious will for our lives. But he is not angry. God is not angry with you. Like a mother hen, his desire is to gather you under his protection. He is grieved most when we refuse his forgiveness.

God has dealt with your sin. God dealt with his own righteous anger when for a moment the Father turned his back on the Son and poured out all his wrath over sin. There the Son, a willing sacrifice, joyfully bore that condemnation for the sake of securing your eternal forgiveness. So God is not angry with you. God is never angry with you. He is gracious and loving toward you. His desire is for you to live and rejoice as his forgiven child. For this reason, Jesus journeyed toward the cross, to bear your sin and secure for you and eternal redemption. He was rejected for you. So confess your sin, believe, and live. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.