

A PROPHET'S LOVE

Luke 13:31-35

Second Sunday in Lent (Series C)

March 16, 2025

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 13, verses 31 through 35. 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.

The sermon today is based on this gospel lesson from Luke, but also on the Old Testament lesson from Jeremiah 26 and the epistle lesson from Philippians 3. I really appreciate the way they put these three texts together as the readings for today. They all show the love that God's prophets have for his people, and especially centering on the love of Christ for people who refuse his call to repentance and who even plot to kill him. So Jesus, of course, stands at the center of our attention. But Jeremiah and Paul also demonstrate this kind of love as they hurt for those who refuse to repent.

Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem around 600 BC, with about twenty years spanning both sides of the turn of that century. He prophesied leading up to the fall of Jerusalem, which finally came in 586 BC, when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took the city, leveled the wall, and demolished the temple. This was the LORD's discipline for the people of Israel turning their hearts away from him and refusing his call to repentance.

After King Josiah died around 609 BC, Judah had a succession of four evil kings. King Josiah was a righteous man, but the four kings after him were evil. We don't know the full extent of their evil deeds. But among their evil deeds, they worshipped false gods (Jer. 1:16), as other wicked kings before them had done. 2 Kings says regarding the second one, Jehoiakim, that "he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood" (24:4). God sent prophets during this time, but the four evil kings refused to repent.

To make matters worse, the priests and the so-called "prophets" in Jerusalem sided with the evil kings. They assured them that the warnings of the true prophets were false, and that the LORD would never allow his holy city to fall or his temple to be desecrated. So they still had worship and sacrifices at the temple during the reigns of these evil kings, but it had become mere

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superstition. *Go to the temple, say the magic words, sprinkle the special blood, and God won't let anything bad happen.*

But the LORD, Yahweh, was jealous for his people. And by "jealous" I do not mean that he was insulted by their indifference or their worship of other gods. That would mean that Yahweh was jealous *for his own sake*. God is never that. But he was jealous *for their sake*. He knows that he is the only God, so he is the only one who can truly save us from death. Whenever he is jealous, he is jealous *for our sake*. So he sent prophets to warn the kings, the priests, the prophets, and the people. But none of them listened.

The greatest of these prophets was Jeremiah. Jeremiah loved Jerusalem. He loved the people there. He even loved the kings, priests, and prophets who resisted his preaching. He wept over Jerusalem because of their hardness of heart.

The passage we read today took place during the reign of Jehoiakim. He was the second of the four evil kings and reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years. He was one of the sons of Josiah, but he did not follow in his father's steps.

In the verses we read, Jeremiah had just finished preaching in the court of the temple. He called Jerusalem and her leaders to repent, so that the LORD would relent of the disaster he intended (26:3). But, as we read, the priests and prophets threatened Jeremiah with death. They considered it blasphemy that Jeremiah would prophecy the destruction of the temple. God had promised, over and over again in the Old Testament, to be faithful to his people and protect them from their enemies. And it seems that the priests and prophets claimed these promises, but in a faithless way, if that makes any sense.

They believed God would be faithful to them, but they did not desire to be faithful to him. They claimed his promise to protect them, but they did not want to trust his commandments to teach them how to live. This was a breach of the LORD's covenant with them, because he promised to protect them in the land as long as they kept his commandments, but if they forsook his commandments, and if they worshipped other gods, he would take the land away from them (e.g., Deut. 6:1-15).

It's like the people and their leaders wanted to have the promises of the Gospel without the commandments of the Law. They did not really want *forgiveness* of their sins, but *acceptance* of them. This is not truly faith in the Gospel. We can't really have the Gospel if we reject the Law. We will take the Gospel for granted. God's promises of protection and forgiveness are true. But the people wanted to have those promises without listening to the rest of God's Word. But that just doesn't work. They claimed those promises, but then they closed their ears to the rest of God's words. And by doing so, they revealed that they really did not trust the God who made those promises. How can you trust the promise without trusting the God who made it? If they did trust that God, they would listen to the rest of his words. They would believe those words are also true and good.

We become guilty of the same sin when we claim certain promises of the Gospel, but find some excuse to not live by his commandments, or we refuse to confess our sins. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). We might say, "God will forgive every sin." And that's true. That is 100% true. But how do our hearts respond to that? Do we say, "Therefore, I will live however I want with no fear of God"? Or do we say, "Therefore, I will confess my sins, and I will seek Jesus' help to resist temptation"? If we say, "I will live however I want," that's taking forgiveness for granted, and it is not faith. If we say, "I will decide which commandments are really necessary," that's trusting our own judgment over

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the LORD's. We might try to claim the promises of the Gospel without really trusting the God who made those promises. That's not really faith, and it will not save.

We know that, in this life, we will not live in perfect obedience to God's commandments. We will not even perfectly understand his commandments. We will sin intentionally and unintentionally. But when we fall, or when our sin is made known to us, God invites us to confess that sin and be forgiven through Jesus' blood. That's repentance. And, day by day, sometimes slowly, we learn that his commandments are good for us. So we learn to trust them, all the while confessing our sins when we fail.

But Jeremiah prophesied to hearts that resisted this. And it was painful to him. He faithfully obeyed the LORD's command to prophesy to these people. As the LORD loved these people, so did Jeremiah. That was his burden. He loved them. He wanted them to turn in repentance and be saved. He pleaded with them for their own good. But they refused. Not only did they refuse, but they hated him and sought to kill him for the good he had done.

The passage we read from Philippians 3 is similar in many ways. Like Jeremiah, Paul was imprisoned for preaching the Gospel. He was even in prison when he wrote Philippians. But Paul had joy, in spite of his circumstances. He knew that his citizenship is in heaven, so he was looking forward to the appearance of Jesus and the transformation of his body (Phil. 3:21). Furthermore, while he was in chains, "The word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. 2:9). He rejoiced that people were believing and being saved.

If Jeremiah could see Paul, I think he would say, "Man, that guy's got it good. People actually believe him sometimes." Jeremiah was alone, or, at least, very close to it. But Paul had "brothers" in various different cities that he could write to. After the resurrection of Jesus, faith exploded around the world. Paul and the other apostles were far more successful in preaching repentance than the prophets were. They were even far more successful than Jesus was during his ministry. The main reason for this was the giving of the Holy Spirit, which we're talking about on Wednesday evenings. So when Paul and the other apostles preached the Gospel, the Holy Spirit attended to his Word, and people believed. Not everyone, but many did.

Nevertheless, despite his relative success, Paul still wept for those who did not believe. He says, "For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18). For sure, he's thinking of some of his fellow Israelites who refused to see Jesus as the Christ (Rom. 9:2-3), but probably others as well. Paul preached to many people in his travels, both Jews and Gentiles. He pleaded with all of them to believe. While some did, many did not, and that broke his heart the same way Jeremiah's heart was broken. He says with tears, not anger, "Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things" (Phil. 3:19). It's important to read that verse in context. Paul is not angry at them for not believing. When someone disagrees with us, or when they plot against us, we might want them to come to destruction. But Paul says this with tears of sadness for them. He sees the way earthly things have captivated their hearts. "Their god is their belly." That is, they live to do whatever makes them feel satisfied. The desire for pleasure is a false god that has captivated their hearts and closed them to the true God. For them, Paul weeps, as we all should. We should desire for all to have the same thing we have: citizenship in heaven. This citizenship enables us to endure suffering, and even hatred in this world, as Jeremiah and Paul did, knowing that we will see our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, appear again. And when he does, he will transform our lowly and mortal bodies to be like his glorious body. And we will live forever in his eternal kingdom of righteousness.

And in the gospel lesson, we see Jesus lamenting over Jerusalem. It's the same pity Jeremiah and Paul had, but it's the strongest in Jesus.

It's an interesting text, with a few connections to other passages in Luke. Luke often connects his stories together in clever ways.

You might remember that at this point in *The Gospel of Luke*, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to be crucified. We talked about this a couple of weeks ago when we considered Jesus' transfiguration. Chapter 9 of Luke is a turning point where Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem and the cross (9:51). He took his time getting there. You could walk from Galilee to Jerusalem in a few days, but Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem fills up chapters 10 through 19. He had some teaching and healing to do on the way.

So this occurs while Jesus is still in Galilee. Some Pharisees warn Jesus to flee from Herod, because, they say, "Herod wants to kill you" (13:31). And just to clarify, this is not the same Herod who attempted to kill Jesus when he was a baby, but this is his son. Now we can't read the Pharisees' minds, but the more I think about this, the more I think they were lying to Jesus. It was, after all, the Pharisees who plotted with the Sadducees to kill Jesus. And later in the Gospel, Luke writes about how Herod actually had a chance to kill Jesus but declined. Remember that Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem during the Passover. And Herod also went to Jerusalem for the Passover. Herod ruled in the northern part of Israel, which was Galilee. And Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea in the south. So when the Jewish council handed Jesus over to Pilate, Pilate sent him to Herod, hoping that Herod would deal with this, since Jesus was from his region. That way Pilate could keep his hands clean. But Luke says, "When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him" (23:8). Herod was no believer; he just wanted to be entertained. Jesus, apparently, did no sign for him, so Herod and his soldiers mocked Jesus, and he sent him back to Pilate (23:11).

So it seems that the Pharisees lied about Herod wanting to kill Jesus. In truth, they were more likely trying to trick Jesus into going to Jerusalem, where the real trap was laid for him. And Jesus knows about this. So he says that he will spend a few more days there, casting out demons and performing cures. Then he will go to Jerusalem. And he even tells them the reason he goes to Jerusalem. "For it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem" (13:33). He knows they're going to kill him there, and that is why he goes there.

Then he laments for Jerusalem. He even laments for these Pharisees who plot to kill him. He recalls how Jerusalem killed the prophets who were sent to call her to repentance. We think of how they resisted and persecuted Jeremiah. And tradition says that Jeremiah was stoned to death (cf. Heb. 11:37). Jesus says, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (13:34). And Jesus says this, not merely as a man of thirty-some years, but as the eternal God who brought Israel out of Egypt, settled them in the land of Canaan, and sent prophets to her. Throughout their entire history as a people, Jesus desired to gather them under his wings and protect them. But they were like crazy little chickens, running this way and that, anywhere but his protective care.

That's how it is when God calls us to repentance. It's not, *shape up or I'm going to get you*. It's, *come and let me protect you*. To us, it looks as if the things of this world are good and pleasurable. That's how the fruit looked to Eve. And the commandments of God appear restrictive. Then we break the commandments, and we feel like God is out to get us. That's how

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it looks from the perspective of the sinful flesh. But God sees the true reality. He looks down with pity and compassion on us. He sees all the false gods that the devil uses to draw us away from the saving God. He sees the lies that make his commandments appear evil and evil look good. He sees how vulnerable we are to these enticements and attacks. All he wants is to save us from it.

So Jesus speaks of this painful love he has for Jerusalem. The pain isn't really the flogging he would receive, or the strikes from soldiers, or the crown of thorns, or the nails in his hands and feet. I'm sure those things hurt even more than I can imagine. But the pain in God's heart is that he loves the very people who kill him. He goes to the cross willfully to save them and the entire world. But they refuse the salvation that plays out before their eyes and at their hands. Nevertheless, he still goes to the cross for them. He even prays, **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"** (23:34).

And so you too, throughout our lives, at many times, even daily, our God is calling us to repentance. He calls us to confess our sins, forsake our false gods, and find forgiveness and protection under his gracious wings. Like a mother hen or a Good Shepherd, he will shelter you. After all, this is the same Jesus, who, despite the pain of hatred, sin, and death, endured the cross for our sake. God forgives you for the sake of Jesus' blood, and his mercy is infinite. He will shelter you through this life, and he will bring you into his eternal kingdom, where your true citizenship lies. Amen.

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