

At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."

³² *He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'* ³³ *In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!*

³⁴ *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! ³⁵ Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"* (Luke 13:31-35)

The True Heart of Jesus

In my youth, I was kind of a political junkie. I remember when George W. Bush ran against Al Gore for president. During one of the debates, it sounded like Gore was getting personal. When someone objected, Gore said something like, "I'm not talking about his heart. I think he's a good person." I remember thinking at the time, "How does he know what's in Bush's heart?" A couple of years ago, I was deliberating a call to Texas and I was talking with the district president down there about whether that church really fit the gifts God has given me. He said, "Geoff, I know your heart." Again, I wondered, how does he know what's in my heart? We simply cannot truly and absolutely know what's in anybody's heart. Only God can see through the masks we hide behind and know what we're thinking and feeling. But at the same time, Jesus himself said, "By their fruits you will know them." Most of the time, what we do and say gives a pretty fair reading on what's in our hearts. Even if it's true that we sinners sometimes pretend to think and feel something different than what we really do, Jesus wasn't a sinner. He was as transparent and genuine as any human being could ever be. So today, in our gospel lesson we see **the true heart of Jesus.**

I.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. But he was still in Galilee, probably weeks away from that triumphant march into the city on Palm Sunday. Galilee was ruled by Herod Antipas, the son of the Herod who slaughtered the babies of Bethlehem. This was the Herod who executed John the Baptist. Jesus would meet him in a few weeks on Good Friday. Herod had a problem: he wasn't very popular. So Jesus scared him. Herod worried that Jesus might cause a riot or even a revolt. So he sent Jesus a veiled threat. Luke tells us that some Pharisees came to see Jesus. The Pharisees were actually Herod's enemies, but they hated and feared Jesus, more, so they acted like they had come because they were concerned about Jesus' welfare. They said, **"Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."** How nice of them, huh? Well, Jesus wasn't fooled. In fact, if they were going to be Herod's messenger boys, Jesus had a message for them to take back. He said, **"Go tell that fox,"** – go tell that schemer – **"I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal."**

What was Jesus saying? He was telling Herod that he didn't care about his threats. Jesus wasn't going to change his plans. He had sermons to preach and people to heal and demons to drive out, because God had sent him to do those things to show that he was the true Savior. And when this petty, little puppet of the Romans tried to scare him, Jesus defied him and even called him names. Why was he so bold? Because he had perfect faith in God's plan. He went on to say that no prophet can die outside Jerusalem. Jerusalem was not part of Herod's territory. So no matter how much Herod fumed, nothing could turn Jesus from his preaching. Nothing could turn him from the cross. Nothing could keep him from saving us.

Jesus was perfect in his faith. Think how easy it is for us to be intimidated. Think how hard it can be for us to talk about our faith. Which is harder, talking about Jesus to strangers or to people whose opinions matter to you? Each is hard in its own way. That fear comes from sin and weakness. Jesus didn't share that sin or weakness. His faith was perfect in our place. It counts for us. Jesus' power is there when we share his gospel. No sinner can stop what God is doing through us. Their efforts aren't even worthy of his notice. **The true heart of Jesus scorns opposition.**

II.

But this confrontation did remind Jesus of what was coming. He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Of course, that shows us just how much he loves us. But don't miss what else Jesus said. After pointing out that the people of Jerusalem did not want his love, he said, **“Your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”**

What was that all about? In a word, judgment. **“Your house is left to you desolate”** – what was their house? The most obvious answer is the temple. For the Jews, the temple was the visible symbol of God's presence among them. But it would be destroyed and to this day, it has never been rebuilt. God sent them a message with that event: rejecting Jesus meant losing their relationship with him. That points to a wider meaning of the house: the house of Israel, the chosen people of God. Because they turned away when God kept his greatest promise to them, they were replaced with a new people, the Christian Church.

But in what sense would they not see him until they said, **“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”**? Well, he was on his way to Jerusalem and that's one of the things they would shout on Palm Sunday. But you know what? A few days later, Jesus repeated this entire statement about wanting to gather Jerusalem under his wings and the fact that they would not see him again until they said this. When would they say this again? On Judgment Day. Palm Sunday is really a prophecy of Jesus returning in all his glory to judge the world.

When that day comes, Israel's house will be left to them desolate. Jesus will condemn them for refusing to believe in him. That is part of his heart, too. God is holy. Holiness demands that sin be punished. Jesus is the Son of God. He is just as holy and just as insistent that sin be punished as the Father is. Today, people don't like to see this side of Jesus. The failure to see Jesus' justice has led to churches all over the world abandoning all the God says about marriage and sexuality and the sanctity of life. People present Jesus as if he would never punish anyone. But that is a lie of the devil. Jesus took a hard line here because his heart hates sin. But this reading isn't here so that we can shake our heads at Herod and the Pharisees and the people of Jerusalem and congratulate ourselves on being so much better. No, my friends, it's here to warn us. We are now the people of God. But if we figure we can get away with a little sin because we're forgiven anyway, if we hear those arguments that Jesus would never punish anyone and we use that as an excuse to go along with all that our society says because it's just easier, we are risking the same judgment. If we kill our own faith, we will not face a loving Savior on Judgment Day. We will face the Lord of glory who will condemn us to hell. It is imperative that we understand that. **The true heart of Jesus hates sin.**

III.

Jesus came into this world because he hates sin. He hates what it has done to our world. He hates the way it twists our hearts and ruins our lives. He came to conquer sin and end its power here. Yes, he will condemn those sinners who refuse his love. But that's not the solution he prefers. In this reading, Jesus shows us his deepest and truest self: his love.

Jesus said, **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, 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 mourned for Jerusalem. It saddened him deeply to condemn to hell the people he came to save. Jesus wanted to gather them under his wing, like a mother hen gathers her chicks. Why does a hen do that? To protect her babies. To care for them. Jesus came into this world to gather his people into his church and to provide them with the eternal life that only he could give. Jesus wanted to provide for them and protect them from the devil and the evil world around them. He wanted them to feel the peace of knowing their Savior for the rest of their lives on this earth and then he wanted them to go home to heaven.

Jesus wants that for us, too. By the grace of God, we have it. Now, we don't have it because we're better or more spiritual or smarter or closer to God than they were. You and I were born in sin, just like they were. You and I are natural egotists, just like they were. The only difference between us and them is that we believe in the Savior and they didn't. How did that happen? Not because we made a better choice. But simply because the Holy Spirit worked in our hearts and gave us faith. God adopted us – he had to drag us into his family against our will. But he did it.

Why? So that he could love us. So that he could gather us under his wings. So that the almighty Son of God could protect us and care for us all the days of our lives here. Jesus went to Jerusalem so that we would have the quiet hearts that children have when they know their parents are there taking care of everything. We are those children, those chicks, and Jesus has gathered us under his wings.

To do that, Jesus had to finish that trip to Jerusalem. He had to defy Herod and his threats. He had to stump the Pharisees and their hypocrisy. He had to push past all the forces of evil who wanted to distract him and torpedo his mission. He had to enter Jerusalem in triumph and then have the crowds turn on him and cry out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" He had to be dragged out of the city and nailed to that cross and hung there in agony. He had to have his Father in heaven dump all the sins of all the world on him and abandon him to hell. He had to die. He had to suffer all that our sin deserves, all that God's judgment requires. He had to pay for the egotism that thinks we're better than those dumb people in the past were and for the fear that keeps us from sharing the gospel and for the selfishness that wants to accept the lies of the devil and get along with the world. He had to defeat the devil and the world and hell itself.

Jesus did all those things. He forgave us and he set us free for all our sins deserve. He will bring us home to heaven when our time is due. He will raise our bodies from the dead. And he will care for us here. He forgives our sins when we wrestle with guilt. He gives us peace when the world around us makes no sense. He enables us to trust that God is our heavenly Father and we are his dear children. And God knows what he is doing and why.

This week, I got a message that one of our members was in the hospital. I went to see her. She's been battling with cancer for some years now and the truth is, she's going to lose the battle, unless God decides to take her home in some other way. But at the same time, I expected God to take her home a couple of years ago. But he had other plans. As we talked about that reality, I pointed out to her that when she was raising her children, there were times that she had to take them places. So she would put them in the car and take them. It wasn't up to the kids to decide what the best route was. It wasn't up to them to evaluate the traffic or know which roads were under construction or to decide how long the trip should take or what stops to make along the way. That was mom's job. The same is true for our lives. We are the children and God straps us into our car seats and he takes us where we need to go: to heaven. It's not up to us to decide what route we take to get there. It's not up to us to decide how long that trip will be or what potholes we'll have to face along the way. It's not up to us to decide how easy or hard that trip will be. That's God's job. That's Jesus' job. It's our job to be safe under his wings and to make that trip with him. He will get us through this life to heaven because that is his deepest desire. Above all else, our Savior wants us to trust this truth: **the true heart of Jesus longs to save us.**

It's not hard for us to know what's in Jesus' heart. He shows us again and again. Trust in that heart. It drove him to Jerusalem to die and rise for you. It drove him to gather us here under his wings. It drives him to watch over us and care for us until we get home. Amen.