

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT
Year C
February 28, 2010
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18
Psalm 27
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 13:31-35
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Three *desires* and a *must*.

“Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” I find it intriguing that it is “some Pharisees” who sound the alarm, who warn Jesus of the danger he is in. And it was real danger. This is the Herod who beheaded John the Baptizer. Not long after Herod had John’s head served up on a platter before all the distinguished guests during Herod’s birthday party, the King began hearing stories of a stirring preacher and a worker of miracles; he wondered if it might be John raised from the dead. From that time on, Herod sought to meet this preacher and healer. He was hoping to see Jesus perform a miracle—how exciting that would be! But now, some four chapters later, Herod wants to kill Jesus.

The irony about Herod is that he finally has his chance to meet Jesus, not long after the scene in our gospel for today. After Jesus is arrested, he is brought to Herod for interrogation. Herod, mocking him, can find no fault in him, and he sends him back to Pilate. Of course, he knows that others will do the dirty work.

“Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” Do you ever wonder what it is about Jesus that makes people want to get rid of him?

Three *desires* and a *must*. The first desire is Herod’s: he desires to kill Jesus.

I wonder if those Pharisees ever went back to Herod to report what Jesus had told them: “Go and tell that fox for me . . .” “Go and tell that *varmint*, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. . . .’” Despite the threats against him, Jesus is undeterred in his work and mission.

But if Herod is a threat to Jesus’ safety, Jerusalem is a much greater one, and Jesus knows it. “Yet 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.” Herod’s threat was insignificant compared to that one that awaited Jesus in Jerusalem.

“Jerusalem, 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 . . .”

Here we can almost hear Jesus weeping for his beloved Jerusalem. Do you ever wonder how it is that Jesus goes to the very place that will kill him? It is his great love. His love is greater than his fear; his love *casts out* fear.

Jesus gives us one of the most tender and endearing metaphors of his love for his people. He is a mother hen whose great desire is to gather her brood under the shelter of her wings. How often have we seen a mother duck or goose, out in front, leading her brood from one place to another, and when there is danger, she will gather her brood under the shelter of her wings? (Our bulletin cover this morning attempts to capture the image, except that the outstretched arm looks more masculine than feminine to me, and robs us of the sense of safety and nurture offered by the feminine, maternal image.)

“Jerusalem, 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 . . .”

Three *desires* and a *must*. The second desire is Jesus’: he desires to gather us together in safety and love and nurture.

“. . . and you were not willing!”

“How often I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, *and you were not willing!*”

Three *desires* and a *must*. The third desire is ours: we desire *not* to be gathered together in the safety and love and nurture of Jesus.

This is the reason for Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!” Jesus’ lament is not for himself, over his own fate. Rather, Jesus’ lament is for us and for our unwillingness to be gathered to him. His lament is over our rejection of him, of our insistence on going our own way.

Three *desires* and a *must*. The first desire is Herod’s: he desires to kill Jesus. The second desire is Jesus’: he desires to gather his children together. The third desire is ours: we desire *not* to be gathered.

Three *desires* and a *must*. The *must* in this story is that Jesus *must* be on his way, and that way is to Jerusalem. Already in the ninth chapter of Luke, Jesus has “set his face to Jerusalem.” It’s not only a *directional* indicator; it is also a *volitional* one. Above all else, Jesus must go to Jerusalem, regardless of any other competing agendas or circumstances or desires, regardless of the consequences, even *knowing* the consequences. And the consequences are his suffering and death.

Jesus must go to Jerusalem, for it is there that God’s love for humanity will be revealed most profoundly in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus’ overriding *must* relativizes all other desires, all other agendas.

In our “Forty-Day Lenten Devotional” for this year, one of our contributors talks about the SMDC billboards that depict physicians with the phrase, “If I could tell you one thing . . .” *Just one thing*. What is the *just one thing* that defines your life, that motivates your decisions, that relativizes all other desires and agendas? We just sang in our psalm, “One thing I ask of the Lord; one thing I seek . . .” What is the *just one thing* in your life. If you have never asked that question of yourself, now, during this journey of Lent, is the time. *Just one thing*.

For Jesus, his *just one thing* is the *must* of his going to Jerusalem. It is the divine imperative that compelled Jesus to go to Jerusalem. It is the same divine imperative that invited Abram in our First Lesson to leave his homeland to go to a place he had never been, compelled by a promise. It is the same divine imperative that invited the Apostle Paul in our Second Lesson to forsake his past life of privilege and prestige and to become conformed to Christ. And it is the same divine imperative that invites us to come along.

Thanks be to God! Amen.