

Jesus' Journey for Salvation

Luke 13:31-35

I. *Salvation arrives not on the world's terms.*

II. *Salvation is given freely solely on God's terms.*

Jesus draws nearer to Jerusalem this Second Sunday in Lent and the picture is not a pretty one. **“At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.”** (verse 31). This was no inside information that the Pharisees wanted to tell Jesus so no harm would come to Him, rather the Pharisees were rejoicing in the hatred Herod had with them.

Jesus' ministry climaxed in a no win situation: some people hated Jesus for what He was saying and doing and they wanted Him dead, other people hated Jesus for what He was not doing and what He was not focusing on and in the end they too wanted Him dead.

Our gospel for today takes place in the Gospel of Luke when Jesus is on His journey to Jerusalem. On this journey Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees with a message about Herod's intentions. There is more than one Herod in the New Testament. Herod the Great renovated the Temple of Jerusalem in the years just before Jesus' birth. Herod the Great was the leader who called the Magi to himself to determine where the Christ child was born and it was this Herod who had the male children under two years old put to death in Bethlehem in order to stop any possible challenge to his throne.

The Herod we encounter in today's gospel is Herod Antipas son of Herod the Great. This Herod was the one who had John the Baptist beheaded and it was this Herod who Jesus would eventually stand before the night before His crucifixion. Like his father, Herod was concerned for his power and his throne and any and every possible threat to it would be a priority for him. More than anything else Jesus was a threat to Herod because Jesus was referred to as a king. Remember Herod's father, Herod the Great murdered the children of Bethlehem because they had come to worship the king born in Bethlehem. (see Matthew 2:2).

It was for this reason that Herod was not particularly interested in having Jesus active and around. For that matter the Jewish religious authorities were not particularly interested in having Jesus around either since Jesus had the nasty habit of healing, restoring and seeking the lost and the downcast and allowing them to participate in a relationship with

God. It is for this reason that the Pharisees come to Jesus with a message that Herod wants Jesus dead. The Pharisees were not interested in giving Jesus a 'heads up' on what possible danger awaited Jesus at Jerusalem but rather they were hoping Jesus wouldn't go to Jerusalem at all. In essence the Pharisees were trying to get Jesus to go further away from them and their area.

The Pharisees and Herod combined represent the world steeped in sin who doesn't want to be confronted with God, especially an all holy God who will not let sin go unpunished. We are reminded that Jesus was hated in His own day. Some such as the Pharisees and Herod hated Jesus for the message He was preaching and for the actions He was performing. How dare this man (and a Galilean to boot!) challenge the religious authorities of the day and how dare He claim to be a King!

Yes, Jesus was hated not just generally but specifically for His claims, His actions, and His ministry. If Jesus would not leave them alone then the only other solution would be to kill Jesus. This of course would take place in Jerusalem and Jesus knew it, but only Jesus understood the good that this would bring to the world.

There is another aspect that we do not want to forget today and that is that Jesus was also hated for what He did **not** do. The people in Jesus' day loved His miracles, His power, His strength and they wanted more-- they wanted a lot more, here and now! Jesus' popularity with most vanished when it became apparent that He was not going to give them what they wanted.

This was brought especially home for me in the past week as I was doing some research. I came across a response from a Rabbi as to why Jews do not accept Jesus as the Messiah. This is the response of Rabbi Barry Dov Lerner who is a Conservative Jew. Rabbi Lerner writes:

The Hebrew Bible describes the Messiah as a national savior who would arrive at the time of the Babylonian exile (hundreds of years before Christianity) and restore the nation of Israel with a capital at Jerusalem.

The original "messianic" aspirations of the Jewish People was to return from Exile and to restore the Davidic dynasty and the Jewish nation. While there was partial fulfillment of those hopes, given the return from Babylonia and the rebuilding of the Second Temple, new ideas were arising in that part of the world.¹

¹ From the website: http://judaism.about.com/library/3_askrabbi_c/bl_jesus.htm

Rabbi Lerner goes on by stating that the idea of a Messiah is one that is not essential to Judaism, at least not contemporary Judaism. He concludes by saying: "In sum, today some do and some don't believe in a personal Messiah or a person as a Messiah, and others speak of a messianic period when life is good for all humanity." (cited above).

Jesus was aware of His imminent rejection and nothing stopped Him from going to Jerusalem specifically to be rejected and ultimately die for this was the very reason why Jesus came. Jesus said: **"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.' In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day--for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"** (verses 32-33). Jesus is acknowledging His death even if the Pharisees who first heard these words did not understand what Jesus was saying. What is Jesus saying by focusing on today and tomorrow and the third day? It means clearly that Jesus was in control and Jesus was going to bring something about not only without the world's help but even in spite of the world! Jesus was going to give a gift to the world, one which they didn't want but was universally needed.

Jesus' comments don't stop there. Jesus also has words of condemnation for the people of Jerusalem too. **"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! 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.'"** (verses 34-35). Interestingly these last words of Jesus take place when He arrives on what we know as Palm Sunday the Sunday before Jesus died on the cross for the world.

Jesus came as the Savior of the world, He came to His own yet they did not receive Him. Just as the persecuted, rejected and killed the prophets who proclaimed the Messiah would come so they too would reject and kill the Messiah Jesus. Why? Because Jesus came on His own terms and not theirs. They wanted an earthly kingdom and a pleasant earthly life. In so doing they rejected Jesus and the salvation He earned.

Today we are reminded that God comes to us as well not on our terms but on His own terms. God calls us to faith today. God calls us to salvation today through Himself and none other because: **"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."** (Acts 4:12). But this salvation and gift is only received and it only comes to us on God's terms. This is something that in sin even faithful Christians struggle with.

Today we are reminded that God does not come to us in a everyday common sense way just as God did not accomplish great things in Jesus' day in a way that they were expecting. Here we want to be careful because it is not the case that the Christian faith is irrational or illogical but so much of Christianity transcends earthly wisdom. It is for this reason that the walk of the Christian means subordinating his daily, earthly logic and knowledge to what God gives us in Scripture. The world cannot handle this and considers much, if not all of the Christian faith to be illogical, irrational and hence unreliable.

A powerful testimony to Scripture is that it actually acknowledges this response of the world and deals with it. In fact Paul tells us quite plainly that: **For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."** (1 Corinthians 1:18-19).

Today Jesus tells the people of Jerusalem that He **"longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."** (verse 34). When people reject God they reject Him out of their own sin and evil and they are and will be held accountable before God on the day of judgment.

With such a clear simple understanding of sin and the consequence of sin our natural reason comes in and says something like: "Well if people are the reason why they are condemned and their damnation is their own fault then if someone is saved it must likewise be a result of something they did on their own. While this seems reasonable it is unbiblical. It is unbiblical because the Bible teaches in no uncertain terms that salvation is the result of God's work not man's work. Man is saved by faith and faith itself is a gift from God. (Ephesians 2:8-9). One can only have a truly godly, biblical understanding from filling their mind with Scripture and not the world. Dealing with God and the world with our limited reasoning skills is not our only struggle either.

Just as God has promised salvation to all who believe in Him so He also promises that all things work together for those who love Him (Romans 8). This seems all so neutral and matter of fact when life is going well but it is hard to understand when life is difficult. God calls us to follow and to trust and to rest in Him.

Jesus told Herod through the Pharisees that He had work to do, work for a that day the next day and yet a third day and Jesus accomplished that work just as He will bring to fruition everything He has promised to us today. Today we remember that all God has promised is in His hands and will be completed according to His timeline. Amen.