

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
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Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Second Sunday in Lent
February 28, 2010
Luke 13:31-35

"You Would Not, Jesus Would"

by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

There is a great contrast depicted in the relatively short Gospel reading for this week. There is also a very appropriate message for this week of the Lenten season as well. The other readings add to this picture and supplement it. On the one hand you have the stubborn refusal of people to heed the law, the admonitions and the warnings of the Lord. On the other hand you have the steadfast love of the Lord, the work of Jesus Christ in his redeeming love. There is a call to repentance and a summons to faith in these readings. We can summarize this quite simply in the words of our theme: "You Would Not, Jesus Would."

In connection with these texts, the moving and deeply spiritual words of the Hymn of the Day for this week are echoing as well. Don't be surprised if you hear some of those words again. May the Lord bless our meditation on His Word.

I. Background

In the Gospel lesson for today, Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, wanted Jesus out of his territory. Jesus at this time was in Perea the area of the Holy Land across the Jordan River from Jericho. And, the Pharisees came to warn Jesus that Herod was going to kill him. Jesus' response to their warning and his lament for Jerusalem are appropriate to our own times as well.

Jesus bluntly told the Pharisees that they should tell Herod that He was following his own course. As our text tells us, he replied, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. 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.'" The ministry of the Lord was not going to be interfered with by any earthly king or government official. It would be fulfilled according to the eternal plan of the Father. The Son of Man would go his way according to that plan and would indeed suffer death but it would take place not according to the scheming of men, but the will of God. The slyness and craftiness of Herod would not deter the Lord from his work. Yet Jesus also prophesied again the place where his death would occur. It would of necessity take place in Jerusalem. For there the opposition and violence against the true Son of God would be focused. The events that would take place there would only be the latest in a long and sad series of events in which the true prophets of God found themselves silenced, threatened, and even put to death for speaking the truth of God.

II. You Would Not

Then comes the sad words of judgment on the part of Jesus. "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 would not! Behold, your house is forsaken." What words of lament and sorrow were thus spoken. You kill the prophets, you stone those sent to you. How often I would have gathered you, but you were not willing. You would not! The Lord sends his word into the world. He sends it freely and without hindrance. The Lord would truly have all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. But there are no sadder words in all the world than these: You would not! The sinful heart of mankind so often rejects the call of God. The very people to whom He was sent, rejected the Son of God and in their anger and hate and rage would nail him to the cross. It is most interesting that Jesus spoke these words of our text again, as he looked over Jerusalem, during Holy Week, just before his death.

And the word of judgment was sure. "Your house is forsaken." Commentators have looked upon these words and debated their full meaning. For the original Greek simply says, "Your house is left to you." Yet in that simple phrase is the horror of the condemnation of God. The Lord says, "I will leave it to you. I will leave it." For what greater judgment can there be than to be abandoned by God. History records that Jesus' words were fulfilled. The city of Jerusalem was besieged, captured, burned, and levelled to the ground. "Not one stone was left standing upon another." It was desolate.

It is the same warning spoken by the prophet Jeremiah about 600 years earlier. It was a warning that caused the people to oppose him though the words needed to be heeded. For the Lord was calling the people to repentance though they would inevitably ignore it then as well. And the first temple and the city were besieged and destroyed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. It is also the warning of St. Paul in the epistle: For many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction ... and they glory in their shame, their minds are on earthly things."

Can you think of times when you would not as well? Our sinful lives turn us away from the will of God. Our priorities become all mixed up. The most important things in our relationship with the Lord become the least important. We would not. Our need for salvation and rescue is so clear. And so the prayer of the second stanza of the hymn of the day says so much: "Let no false doctrine me beguile, let Satan not my soul defile..." as well as the opening verses of the first stanza: "Lord, thee I love with all my heart, I pray thee ne'er from me depart ..."

III. Jesus would

And that is the good news for this day. Though we would not, Jesus would. He sets his face toward Jerusalem to go there to suffer and die. He would gather us under the protection of his wings like the mother hen gathers her chicks. Psalm 91, which was the psalm for last Sunday says it well, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow

of the Almighty. ... He will cover you with his feathers and under his wings you will find refuge, his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart." The same thought is echoed in the 57th Psalm: "Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed."

Many of you may have heard the story of the hen house that was struck by lightning and caught fire. There was nothing anyone could do. After the fire was out, the farmer was sifting through the rubble when a curious sight caught his eye. There on the ground was a hen, charred almost beyond recognition. And yet as he got closer, the farmer heard some tiny sounds, coming from beneath that hen. Looking, he discovered six chicks, alive and well, because they had been gathered under the protecting wings of their mother and saved from the fire. With the psalmist again we say, "I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed." That is the gracious promise of our Lord. That is his work for us. He went through the fires of hell for us. He suffered them upon the cross. As the hymn of the day reminds us: "Thou art the portion I have sought, thy precious blood my soul has bought."

At the end of the Gospel lesson for this day, Jesus says, "You will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'" Those words would ring out from the crowd outside of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday when the Lord Jesus would enter the city at the start of the week of his suffering and death. The way of the Lord was sure and certain. He would. Have you considered the fact that we sing those words as well quite often before Holy Communion when we partake of his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins, when we do see him. And we know for sure that we will see him forevermore. Our hope is not in the earthly Jerusalem but in the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem. "And then from death awaken me, that these mine eyes with joy may see, O Son of God, thy glorious face ..." The epistle for today concludes with words that make us aware that "our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." What a promise from a Lord who would, who would die and rise again, who would accomplish all for us and our salvation.

Conclusion

As a closing prayer for this message, I would refer you to the closing hymn we will sing today. It is from the Lutheran Hymnal and is printed in the bulletin. It was written by a lifelong resident of Milwaukee. Anna Hoppe was part of a circle of religious poets that flourished in this city in the first part of the 20th century. In fact, Doctor Dallmann, the pastor of this congregation 100 years ago, speaks of her in his autobiography. She wrote this hymn based on the words of our text, and the closing verse points us most certainly to the hope that is ours:

O dear Lord of my salvation,
Grant my soul Your blood-bought peace,

By your tears of lamentation
Bid my faith and love increase
Grant me grace to love your Word
Grace to keep the message heard,
Grace to hold you as my treasure,
Grace to love you without measure.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.