

Second Sunday in Lent; March 13, 2022

+ Luke 13:31-35 +

“Jesus Is Determined”

In that very hour, some Pharisees came to him and said, “Leave, and go away from here, because Herod wants to kill you.”

He said to them, “Go tell that fox, ‘Look, I am going to drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the next because it cannot be that a prophet would be killed outside Jerusalem!’

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I have wanted 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 until the time comes when you will say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

The following is based on a true story: once there was a church that hated its pastor. They hated him because he was a downer. He got up every Sunday, and looked the congregation in the eye. Then he told them they were terrible sinners who had abandoned the true God. He told them they needed to repent and return to him before it was too late. But the people didn't want to hear that. They hated him for it. They told him he better knock off all the sin talk, and sing a happy song instead. They told him to preach that God is whoever they want him to be, and they can make God say whatever they want him to say. They could do whatever they wanted, and God wouldn't care, and they'd never have to pay the price. But he refused. He kept warning them about their sin and their lack of faith. So they got angry. They told him again to knock it off, but he wouldn't. So finally, they killed him. They rolled him up in a rug from back in the narthex and dropped him in the parish dumpster.

After a month or so, the Synod President came to the congregation and told the members that even though they hadn't treated the last pastor in a fully ideal fashion, they would be getting a graduate from the next Seminary class to replace him. “Don't bother,” the people told him. “We don't want to hear it anymore. We'll do to him what we did to the last guy.” But the Synod President sent a new pastor anyway. And he preached just like the last one. So, only a few months later, the church members chased him out of town to the middle of a cornfield, and told him he was a dead man if he ever came back.

The next year, the Synod President came back again and announced that the congregation would be getting another Seminarian to be their pastor. The people in the church told him, “If he talks about our sin and speaks in terms of divine absolutes and wastes his breath warning us to repent, he'll end up like the last two.” But the Synod sent another pastor anyway. And he preached and taught like the ones before him. And the church treated him just like the others. (You see, it really wasn't the men that the church hated. It was their message about God's Word overruling human ideas, and sin, and the need to repent. The people didn't want to hear it. So no matter who the messenger was, they rejected him in the worst ways.)

As unbelievable and, frankly, crazy as that story may sound, it really is based on a true story: the story of God, his prophets, and his Old Testament Church. Back in the Old Testament the nation of Israel was God's Church. And God sent them prophet after prophet after prophet with a consistent message: God made you and chose you. His word overrules your ideas and opinions. You are not allowed to do as you please, and you've done wrong. So repent or else. See your sin, admit your sin, turn to God for his grace, or it's curtains for you. But the people of Israel, God's Church, hated that message. And so they threatened the prophets. They ran the prophets out of town. They threw the prophets into empty wells. They killed the prophets. But every time they did, God sent another. And another. And another. Even though God's Church, Israel, treated them all the same.

Until, finally, God sent a Prophet who was more than just a prophet. Finally God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to preach to his church, Israel. Can you imagine, in the story I told, if the Synod President sent his own son out of the Seminary to that hateful, murderous church? He would have to be insane to do a thing like that with his own son! But that's what God did with his own Son, Jesus Christ. He sent his own Son Jesus to his Church, Israel. He sent him with a message of repentance that the Church had rejected a thousand times before. He sent him to the Church of Israel, even though that Church was murderous and hateful to all the prophets before.

You could call that crazy. But at the same time, you could call it the height of love. God was so determined to save his people in Israel that he spared nothing, not even his only Son, to do it. He was so determined to call his Church to repentance that he sent his own Son to do it, despite that church's track record of violent rejection and hate. God was that determined to save his people: determined enough to send his only Son to call back cruel, hateful sinners.

Like his Father, Jesus was determined to save. And so he embraced the cross, where he paid for those sins and all sins. He let nothing keep him from that cross, no matter how powerful or threatening. **In that very hour, some Pharisees came to him and said, "Leave, and go away from here, because Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go tell that fox, 'Look, I am going to drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'"** Jesus was going to do what he needed to do to pay for sin. He was going to carry out a perfect life according to his Father's plan. He was going to die on the cross just the way his Father planned. And he was going to reach the goal of conquering death on Easter Sunday, the third day. And nothing was going to stop him from reaching that goal of salvation. He was determined.

But as determined as he was to save them, the people of Israel simply did not want it: **"Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the next day, because it cannot be that a prophet would be killed outside Jerusalem! Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I have wanted 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."** The people of Jerusalem, who rejected and killed prophet after prophet, would not receive Jesus' salvation. It wasn't because Jesus didn't want them. He was determined to save them; what a tender picture Jesus uses of his desire to gather his people under his wing, to give them the warmth and protection of his love and forgiveness! But as determined as he was to gather his people under his salvation, they just didn't want it.

How can you explain that? How can you explain the Son of God reaching out with his love and grace and being swatted away? You can't. You can only say what Jesus said: they **"were not willing."** They just didn't want it. They killed the prophets before who preached repentance. And now they were about kill the very Son of God. So what did they get instead of Jesus' warm embrace? Jesus tells us, **"desolation."** They didn't want his salvation, so instead they got spiritual ruin. They remained under the wrath of God.

But it was not only the Church of Israel that God was determined to save. It was not just the souls in Jerusalem that Jesus wanted under his wing. He was determined to save you, too. How determined was Jesus to save you? He let nothing and no one stop him. Not hateful Herod. Not the hard-hearted Pharisees or the venomous Sadducees. Not even Satan himself in the wilderness. Not even his own disciples when they misunderstood Jesus' mission and tempted him away from it. Nothing could stop him from paying for your sins. Not even the shame of crucifixion. He went through it all, just as the Father planned, and reached his goal on Easter morning: paying for your sins and rising again to give you life.

Yes, God was determined to save you. And by his grace, you have not treated his Son with rejection as the people of Jerusalem did. By God's grace, the Holy Spirit gave you faith to move under your Savior's wing, where you found his promise of forgiveness, the warmth of his love, the protection of his grace. The Holy Spirit has made you willing. So then how can we explain it when we act a bit like the people of Jerusalem?

We may not be violent about it. We may not kill anyone or chase anyone out of town. We have not physically handed Jesus over to be crucified as they did. But does that mean there is no trace of rejection in us?

Our rejection does not reach the level of Jerusalem's; we have not outright rejected our Savior and turned away in unbelief. But we do still show traces of this rejection in our own lives. As a couple of examples: If you are in the middle of a crisis in life, and you turn everywhere except to your Savior. You take comfort from your friends and family. You listen to your neighbors, and coworkers who don't even know you that well. But you're just not quite interested to find out what God says in his Word. It's a soft rejection. It's non-violent. But it's rejection. When your pastor preaches to you about sin and the need to repent, you may not want to kill him. But you may not exactly listen, either. "Sin? Repentance? What is this, the Middle Ages? Why doesn't he just tell a couple cute stories, give me some tips on how to be happy, and send me on my way to brunch." Ignoring that message from God's Word, resenting it – that's rejection, too. It's quiet. It's soft. But it's rejection.

It is impossible to explain how the people of Israel could reject God's word and salvation when they had every advantage of hearing the prophets, worshiping in the temple, and reading the Old Testament Scripture. It is just as impossible to explain how we, who have faith in the true God, who have his Word and sacraments, who know his promises, can show the slightest trace of it. The most shocking and disturbing rejection of God's Word and salvation does not come from atheists and communists. It doesn't not come from outside Christ's Church. It comes from inside, from the people who know better.

It is a good thing for us that through all rejection, God remains determined to save. The Father showed his determination in sending his Son. Jesus showed that determination in his journey to the cross. And for all the rejection he faced in his own country, his own Church, from his own people, Jesus never lost his

determination to save. And so Jesus closes with words of hope: **“I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of Lord.’”**

When Jesus finally entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (according to the Father’s plan and timetable), there were crowds of people waiting for him, cheering for him, **“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”** welcoming him as the Messiah.

Through whatever rejection we have shown, Jesus has remained determined to forgive us and save us. He has kept us in the true faith with the promise of eternal glory in his embrace. Now when God extends his word of salvation to you, leave whatever has been unwilling behind, and gather under your Savior’s wing. Listen to his word, his call to salvation.

See the Lord’s love in Jesus’ wonderfully determined walk to the cross. See it as Jesus reaches his goal bright and early on the third day. And gather to him. Amen.