

“From Hope to Disappointment”

Luke 13:31-35

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This morning our attention is drawn to one of the saddest moments in Jesus' life. Somewhere along his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem to observe Passover, Jesus had a reality check. The work he had been sent by God to do was not going as well as he had hoped.

While many people accepted his invitation to follow him on this journey toward a new and better life, almost no one in a position of authority did. As a matter of fact, the closer Jesus got to Jerusalem, the more resistance he encountered.

In Luke 9:51, Luke told his readers Jesus was beginning a new phase of his ministry. Up to this point, he had spent his time teaching, preaching and ministering to people around the Sea of Galilee and the surrounding villages. Now, he would turn his attention from Galilee to Jerusalem.

The remainder of Luke's book describes the conversations that took place along this journey and the events that occurred in Jerusalem during and after Palm Sunday, including Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Our text is a part of those conversations.

What we discover by reading these chapters is the tense and terse relationship between Jesus and the religious authorities who were closely connected to the power brokers in Jerusalem. It seems everywhere Jesus turned, he met stiff opposition and strong resistance.

Gotcha questions and verbal traps designed to embarrass Jesus were thrown his way frequently. His credentials and authority were challenged. Attempts were made to sabotage his good work.

As if this wasn't bad enough, our text reveals that Herod placed Jesus on his Most Wanted List, not to have him arrested but killed. The peaceful days of Jesus' early ministry were gone, never to return.

Perhaps this helps you to understand Jesus' lament, which is eerily similar to the words David voiced upon hearing of the death of his son, Absalom. Listen as I read them again.

"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'." (Luke 13:34-5)

The words Jesus spoke to his kinsmen in Jerusalem haunt me. "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

Who among us has not felt this level of pain and disappointment? Haven't all of us had someone in our life we were unable to reach and help? I hope it brings you some degree of comfort to know Jesus could not help everyone he loved, too.

The road from hope to disappointment is a tough one to travel. There is no pretty scenery and nothing about it is enjoyable. Every step of the way our heart yearns to turn around and go the other way.

I ache for Jesus when I read these words that spilled out of his restless and broken heart. Like the prophets who preceded him, he had been sent by God to help people see a new and better way to live. He poured his heart and soul into this mission, leaving the comforts of home and the safety that comes with living close to family and friends to make hope visible to strangers who poured their heart out to him.

He experienced much success at first. People came from near and far to hear him teach and receive a blessing. Lives were changed and the course of history, at least for some people and their families, tilted more toward justice and peace.

But then, Jesus got on the radar of the religious leaders, and they did not like what they saw and heard. Jesus laid the blame for many of the world's problems at their feet. He held them accountable and responsible for the problems he saw, and he called on them to confess their hypocrisy and repent.

He exposed their addiction to power, prestige, attention, money and their lavish lifestyles. He criticized them for using their power and influence for personal gain. He denounced them for making life harder for those who were struggling to survive instead of helping them to rise above their dire circumstances. He called them out for being deceptive and untrustworthy, selfish and greedy, rude and arrogant, insensitive and cruel.

He challenged them to embrace kingdom values and denounce the world's priorities by embracing and pursuing love over hate, serving over being served, sacrifice over self-indulgence, truth over deception, justice over injustice, inclusion over exclusion, generosity over greed, humility over arrogance, forgiveness over revenge, healing over hurting and peace over war.

He insisted they become passionate about confronting evil, righting wrong, lifting up the lowly, liberating the oppressed, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, comforting the grieving, giving people a second chance and building bridges of goodwill, understanding, reconciliation and hope instead of erecting walls of suspicion and hate.

There is no doubt Jesus' words and work created conflict between him and those who chose to control people rather than serve them. Obviously, they were upset with Jesus because he loved the people they did not. He accepted people they excluded. He talked to people they ignored. He healed people they would not touch. He taught people they felt incapable and deemed unworthy of learning. He forgave people they held grudges against. He criticized people they coddled. He gave all he had to help the poor instead of taking all they had to make his life easier.

I think you understand why some of the religious leaders turned on Jesus, as well as Herod who was as guilty of these indiscretions as the religious authorities. Jesus threatened them and the power structure that worked to their benefit.

How different the world would be today if they had listened to Jesus and responded to his message filled with help and hope for all people, including them. The Golden Rule really would be the rule of the land.

They refused to listen, though, choosing instead to arrest and kill him. What Herod could not do, they would, and they did. And when they crucified Jesus, they sealed their own fate. Forty years later, the world as they knew it came crashing down when Rome invaded and destroyed Jerusalem, killing most of them in the siege and raid.

“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’.” (Luke 13:34-5)

Who are you trying to reach today before it is too late? Who is headed down the wrong road, the result of misplaced values and priorities? Who is breaking your restless heart by the decisions they are making? Is it a family member, a dear friend, a co-worker, a schoolmate or a neighbor?

What could I say today that would encourage you? Perhaps it is this.

I think there is a special place in God’s heart for those who weep over others, make sacrifices on their behalf and don’t give up under the most difficult circumstances.

When Jesus wept over Jerusalem, so did God. God wept with Jesus and for the people Jesus was trying to help.

Those with whom and for whom God weeps, God will help. Draw near to the Lord each day and ask for wisdom, strength, courage, will-power and the ability to love unconditionally as long as you have breath.

If God could enable Jesus to be faithful all the way to the cross, so God will help you to persevere. The One portrayed as a hen protecting her chicks and a shepherd willing to search

for every lost sheep will empower you to keep searching for a way to reach that person you are so worried about today.

God knows how hard it is to travel down the road from hope to disappointment. This is why God will take each step with you on this difficult journey. I hope you will let God walk with you.

On the other hand, if you are the one who is breaking someone's heart by heading down the wrong road, God will help you to make some tough changes in your life. God loves you unconditionally and will help you turn from your self-destructive ways. God's forgiveness is real and transformative.

Will you put down your defenses and lay aside your pride? Will you listen to the people who also love you unconditionally and reconsider some of the decisions you are making? Will you turn from the road of disappointment and destruction toward the way of hope?

I pray you will and am confident many others do, too.