

Jim Gill

March 17, 2019

“Jesus’ Lament”

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18 Luke 13:31-35 Philppians 3:17-4:1

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 13:31-35

Last week we looked at the story of Jesus being temptped in the wilderness. In one of those temptations Jesus was taken up and given a vision of all the kingdoms of the world and promised that they could be his if he would just bow before the tempter. This morning’s story takes place later in Jesus’ ministry when he is looking at one of the kingdoms of his world, the one promised to Abraham by God long before-the city of Jerusalem. He hears a news report from some of the members of the religious establishment that moves him to lament over that city. Hear the word of the Lord.

A pastor named Robert Richards once began his sermon with, "As I understand our relative positions, my job is to preach the sermon, and your job is to listen to the sermon. Now, before I begin, I have a favor to ask of you. If you get to the end of your job before I get to the end of my job, would someone please let me know?" **(1)** You can either wave or maybe.... nod. :)

Today we expect instant feedback. We have 24-hour news stations, satellite radio, email alerts, and other ways of finding out breaking news pretty much the instant it is happening. There are times, though, when we can get news too fast.

Sometimes there is simply too much news, so that we can't absorb it all. There is so much suffering around the world. In one sense we have the information that allows us to respond to disasters almost immediately. However, because we have more information than ever, we find ourselves able to tune it out. I saw something on Facebook this week that said, “We are swimming in an ocean of information and drowning in ignorance.” (This week Facebook went down for a few hours and people came out of their homes and met their neighbors and spontaneously broke out into world-wide refrains of Kum Bah Yah...oo)

We can get not only get overwhelmed with T.M.I. (Too much information), but also we can also be overwhelmed with something that's called compassion fatigue. We become numb.

Jesus lived in a time of slow and unreliable communication. Yet even he seemed overwhelmed at times and needed to retreat to a hilltop to get away to pray. He wasn't overwhelmed with information. He was overwhelmed by the compassion he felt for those in need. When Jesus fed the multitudes the gospels say that he felt compassion for a people who had lost their way. This morning we find Jesus on a hillside, looking over a **city** that had lost its way.

As Jesus is looking over the city some Pharisees come to warn him Herod was planning to kill him. Sometimes, friends appear from unexpected sources. As I mentioned in my meditation on Wednesday night, not all Pharisees were hostile to Jesus.

These Pharisees knew that Herod had already executed one annoying prophet, John the Baptist. Now, Herod had another bothersome preacher on his hands. So, these Pharisees urge Jesus to leave before he is arrested and killed. Jesus reply is seemingly uncharacteristic. Jesus lets them know that he has a job to do and nothing, especially a little fox like Herod, is going to keep him from what he came to do.

In the language of my day, a fox was a pretty girl.(especially Megan Fox). In the language of Jesus' day, when Jesus calls Herod a fox he is saying that Herod is insignificant. Jesus was not implying that Herod was sly- like a fox-- rather he was commenting on Herod's ineptitude, or inability, to carry out his threat. Jesus questioned the Herod's pedigree, moral stature and leadership, and put the puppet king" in his place." (2)

Frank Honeycutt writes "Foxes have always had a certain allure over God's children, in this or any century. They may not be quite as bizarre and murderous as Herod, but foxes still slyly woo away the hearts of God's brood. Jesus can walk on water and raise the dead, but he cannot make us love him. He desires such love, but he cannot force it. He cannot keep us from slamming the screen door in his face, defenseless against the many Herods waiting in the shadows.

So what is Jesus' plan? Strangely, his plan is to keep offering the love of a mother hen; keep spreading his wings. He will offer his life to Herod on our behalf. He will follow us into the darkness we have chosen for ourselves, over and over again. He will place himself between that darkness and us.

If you look closely at this man hanging on the cross, his arms eternally outstretched, the span of his reach on that wood will begin to resemble the loving wings of a mother hen, gathering up her chicks in a love that doesn't make sense but breaks our hearts if we look long enough. (3)

This almost has the feel of one of Aesop's fables with barnyard animals playing a starring role. In the short space of five verses, we find pictures of both a fox and a hen. Herod is called a fox. Jesus says he feels like a mother hen. Why does Jesus refer to himself as a hen? Why not a lion or an eagle? Why not a mighty warrior on a white horse from Revelation?

The well-known preacher Barbara Brown Taylor says, "Jesus won't be king of the jungle in this or any other story. What he will be is a mother hen, who stands between the chicks and those who mean to do them harm. She has no fangs, and no rippling muscles. All she has is her willingness to shield her babies with her own body. If the fox wants them, he will have to kill her first." Jesus came to be a suffering servant and live a life of self-sacrifice. And he calls us to that life as well. (4)

Jesus looks from his hillside perch and laments over the city knowing that he will be put to death as a result of his entry into that city. Indeed he declares that he will not enter the city again until it IS time for him to be killed. Still, knowing that the city he was looking at would be his death, Jesus has compassion for them. He laments that he

would not be able to get them to listen. He longed to take them under his protection like a mother hen gathers her chicks.

Compassion fatigue can dull our memory. It's easy to forget. The tragedy of the week may attract our attention for a day or so, but sooner or later that becomes someone else's problem as our minds are focused on the glut of news that leads us to choose celebrity scandals like the College Admissions Scandal or who the Kardashians are dating this week instead of the true challenges that beset us. We must be persistent in showing compassion in a world that wants us to give up or at least ...move on!

The boundaries of our days are picketed with current events, events of such magnitude for good or ill that they cannot be forgotten. Jerusalem isn't the only city that kills its prophets. In my life, events like the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy. Our cities are rocked by tragedies like the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, the destruction on September 11, 2001.

I was in a car dealership waiting on the paperwork in the process of buying a new car when the morning news broke in to show pictures of the towers collapsing on September 11th. I said to the salesman, "I can't buy a car today." He said, "I understand." I left the dealership and went home to watch T.V.... for the rest of the day.

We were still reeling from the news of the Ethiopian airliner that went down killing all on board when the news of the shooting and killing of now 50 people in worship in New Zealand hit. When people were murdered at the Tree of Life Synagogue in worship in Pittsburgh I was able to stand and pray with the rabbis and pastors in the parking lot of the Jewish Community Center. Yesterday I was able to join in prayer in the River Oaks Islamic Center in Houston with those mourning those lives lost in New Zealand. We heard an Imam sing a call to prayer. We heard a rabbi sing Psalm 121 in Hebrew-"I lift up my eyes to the hills from where does my help come? My help comes from the one who made heaven AND earth." We were led by a Roman Catholic priest in praying the prayer our Lord taught us. We stood in silence. And we passed the peace. We shared the shalom. We bore the burden of grief together.

Usama Malik, the only Muslim student currently studying at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary wrote this last Friday. *"The same hate that took 49 in the New Zealand mosques, the same hate that took 11 in a Pittsburgh synagogue, the same hate that took 26 in a Sutherland Springs church, the same hate that claimed 94 in an Ahmadi Muslim mosque in Lahore, and the same hate that took 9 in a Charleston church, knows no faith, nor bound. It is purely hate, emanating from gross misconceptions, perversions, and evil."* (5)

(To which I would add the same hate also took 6 in the Oak Creek Sikh Temple in Wisconsin, and 3 in the Overland Jewish Center in Kansas, and 6 in the Islamic Center of Quebec City)

The glut of national and international tragedies, and the complications should lead us all to join Jesus' lament. Beyond lament we must look out, and beyond, and toward God's suffering world. We may not have all the answers. Our answers may not always work,

but Jesus tells us to get into or maybe back into the game. We have a job to do. Like Jesus' lament over Jerusalem, the city whose name in Hebrew literally means "City of Peace-jeru-city-shalom-peace—we are called to spread our wings and gather the lost and vulnerable under the shelter God has given us to share.

In England in the 1940s a young woman entered Oxford University with little focus. She had no idea what to do with her life. But she soon came under the influence of a colorful professor of English, a writer with a gift, named C. S. Lewis. She became a Christian through much of his influence.

She left Oxford, against the advice of friends and family, and began to study nursing. After five more years of rigorous training, she was certified as a nurse.

But her story doesn't end there, for her Christian spirit would not let her rest with the way things were. She ended up working on a cancer ward in a London hospital. Gradually, she came to realize that most of the doctors ignored the patients who were deemed terminally ill. As a result she watched many of them die virtually alone.

Greatly troubled she felt that Christian compassion needed to be expressed to these patients in a visible way. She approached the hospital administration with an idea she had for surrounding those dying of cancer with friends and loved ones during their last days, rather than isolating them in sterile rooms with strangers. Her radical ideas were quickly rejected.

Undaunted, she decided to enroll in medical school to try to make a difference even though she was already 33 years old and would not graduate until she was 39. This she did and later a movement soon grew around the ideas that made it possible for dying patients to live their days in a setting of love and support.

Out of Christian compassion and a sense of calling to help in a specific way, Cicely Saunders began this movement in England in the 1950s. It later moved to the Americas and is now used everywhere and in every town. It is called the Hospice Movement, and it draws its inspiration from Jesus' own passion and compassion for his children "as a hen gathers her brood under her wings." **(6)**

Jesus said, "Tell those foxes I've got a job to do!" I'm about through with my job this morning. I haven't seen any of you wave or nod so You've done your job of listening. Now, let's do something about what we've heard. Visit some lonely soul. Write a note to someone you haven't seen in a long time. Reach out in compassion to those you know and those you do not know yet. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn. Join in overcoming hate with love ... lest we be another cause for ... Jesus' lament.

(1) Robert Richards

(2) Bernard W. Nord

(3) Frank G. Honeycutt, Sermons on the Gospel Reading, Cycle C

(4) Mickey Anders, The Fox and the Hen

(5) Usama Malik, Austin Seminary student

(6) Glenn E. Ludwig, Walking To - Walking With

Jill Duffield, in her weekly “Looking Into the Lectionary” encourages us though when she writes “When earthly powers are all over the place, calling the shots, rolling over the vulnerable and trying to tell the Son of God to get out of town or else, remember Jesus answer to those trying to tell him where to go and why” “Persevere! In the throes of your own chaos, whether it be illness, worry, fear, ambiguity, uncertainty, remember that Jesus is Jesus is Jesus in the midst of it all. Nothing can thwart the love of God that has come to save us. Nothing. So stay focused on him and don't worry about the foxes or the Pharisees or the rebellious people who will kill their prophets. “(7)

(6) Jill Duffield, Looking Into the Lectionary February 23, 2016

Let us pray. Lord thank you for this insight into Jesus' compassion for others, even for those who would bring about his death. Help us to look at our city and see those that we would long to gather under our protection, to nurture and to help them grow into fellow disciples. Open our eyes to see your truth. Open our ears to hear your voice. Open our minds to receive your word. This we pray in God's holy name.

Frank Ramirez writes about the persistence of a robin. “Birds can be persistent when it comes to making a nest. Last year a robin was persistent in using my porch light as a base for a nest instead of a tree.

When that happened we felt like we had to use the garage door instead of the front door to enter and exit our home, and we couldn't use the light either. So for several days we would take off all the dried grass, string, twigs, and weeds that the mother robin painstakingly placed on the lamp. After about a week we had to go out of town for a couple days and that's all it took. The nest was made, the eggs were laid, and we were using the garage door as an entryway once more. Would that we were as persistent in working for God's kingdom as that robin was in making her nest.”

PRAYER OF PRAISE

Oh Lord, You are the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob, of Sarah and Hagar, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, of Boaz and Ruth, of Joseph and Mary, and of us. God of the covenant, we bring you our offerings of praise and thanksgiving. You have given us a good land in which to dwell; our cup overflows. We praise you for Jesus who came as your servant; he opened the gates for us to enter your kingdom. We laud you for the prophets who proclaimed your vision; through them we see clearly what your covenant involves. We give you all honor for what the disciples delivered to us; they taught us to worship you, and to that end we now lift our voices in praise and adoration. All blessed be your name!

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 15:1-12,17,18

God made a covenant with Abraham that the land of Israel would be given to his descendants. Abraham believed even though he had not yet had a descendant. Hear the making of that covenant from Genesis 15:1-12, and 17,18.

INTRODUCTION TO THE HYMN “When Jesus Wept.”

This morning's gospel lesson tells of the first time that Jesus overlooked Jerusalem and lamented over her. Our next hymn reflects the second time Jesus overlooks Jerusalem as he paused in the middle of his entry into Jerusalem for what we now know as Palm Sunday. The second time the gospel records the shortest sentence in the Bible—two words—Jesus wept.

Let us pray, God of Abraham, Hagar and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac, who fashioned a covenant out of promise and hope, we give you thanks that we are numbered among your sons and daughters. Through Jesus you have called us and named us.

As you have shown favor to countless before us, make us now fitting citizens of your kingdom. Give us the determination to set aside time for prayer and study. Amid the pressures of daily life, help us to be quiet so that we can hear you speaking.

Fill our hearts with compassion for others. Hear our prayers as we lift to you those on our hearts. Especially we pray for Diana Corder and her family as she prepares to receive treatment through M.D. Anderson. Be with Larry Woodcox and his family as they mourn the loss of Larry's cousin in Topeka Kansas.

Forbid that we should grow complacent about our call to ministry. Shape our endeavors to coincide with your desires. If we shy away from confronting evil, inspire us to greater efforts to bring you our offering of justice and peace. Send forth your Spirit to watch over the course of our journey. May what we do be cause for rejoicing and not ...lament. Amen.