

Luke 13:31-35

31 At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." 32 He replied, "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.' 33 In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day--for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem! 34 '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! 35 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.'"

Dear Friends in Christ,

Did you know that the phrase, Wanted: Dead or Alive, is not used by the FBI. Our belief or understanding that it is stems from a television show that was broadcast from 1957 to 1961 starring Steve McQueen. The Northfield, MN sheriff apparently put out such a notice for Jesse James and his gang but even human monsters like Hitler, Hussein and bin Laden were not "Wanted: Dead or Alive." I learned all this after I told the secretary, "Put in the bulletin, Jerusalem: Dead or Alive, because it'll get people's attention." The reason I thought this might be a good guideline for us are the words in our sermon lesson today. Did you hear how Jesus describes Jerusalem? He calls it "the City of Death." This is certainly sharp judgment on the city. Why would Jesus do this?

33 Surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem! 34 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you ... kill the prophets and stone those sent to you

This lesson takes place shortly before Jesus comes to Jerusalem for the last time. Jerusalem is the heart of the Old Testament religion, the place of the temple, the center of justice. Here, the Sanhedrin issued judgments in civil and religious matters. It was their responsibility to recognize and stop false prophets. These are the men who should have known and recognized Jesus as the Messiah. But we are all aware of what the Sanhedrin will do to Jesus when he arrives in Jerusalem. They judged Jesus as guilty of blasphemy, the most severe of religious judgments, punishable by death. But since Jerusalem was now part of a Roman province, the Jews could not carry out a death sentence and blasphemy was not against Roman laws, so the Jews had to create a crime with

which to charge Jesus before the Roman governor. They charged Jesus with treason, saying that Jesus was opposed to Caesar.

Through the centuries the words of Isaiah and Jeremiah had been neglected and rejected. The writings of the prophets Hosea through Malachi were read, memorized, expounded, but no one recognized that these prophets were pointing to a Savior from sin. Jesus, the Son of God himself is the last messenger from God, “*O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem.*” How often he had come, preaching, teaching in the synagogues and the temple. You never heard him. You never listened. Only one more time will Jesus come to Jerusalem and who will hear him then? A Roman centurion and a dying thief. But the rest of Jerusalem, “*hurled insults at him.*”

In today’s reading Jesus states,

Surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem! v 33

Jesus told some “experts in the law” that they were guilty of killing the prophets, “from Abel to Zechariah.” (Conveniently, in English this turns out to be, “From A to Z.”)

(Luke 11:47-51) *“Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. 48 So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. 49 Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’ 50 Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.*

Did Jerusalem kill other prophets? In the sense that the Sanhedrin was responsible for all pronouncements of the death penalty yes.

O Jerusalem! Jerusalem!

These are the people who had received the greatest of blessings. They had witnessed Jesus miracles, heard his message of forgiveness, seen his devotion to the will of the almighty God and yet they rejected him. They wanted nothing to do with the prophets. They did not welcome those whom God had sent to them but they *killed* them, and *stoned* them.

Jesus Christ has shown himself willing, freely willing, to receive poor souls that come to him, and put themselves under his protection: *How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, with such care and tenderness!*

Look, your house is left to you desolate. v 35

Any house that Christ leaves - is *left desolate*. The temple in Jerusalem, no matter how beautifully decorated, no matter how many people visit there is yet *desolate* if Christ has deserted it. He leaves it *to them*; they had made an idol of their temple, a place of false worship that will not bring about their forgiveness. They rejected God's Savior.

Such a desolate picture of Jerusalem is hard for us to grasp because even though we know about the suffering of our Lord Jesus in the Roman courtyard, and his final hours on the cross... there is so much more. The temple in Jerusalem is where the boy Jesus spoke with wisdom to the elders of the church. Jerusalem is where Jesus entered to the glorious songs of the people on Palm Sunday. Jerusalem is where Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples and instituted the gracious sacrament of Holy Communion. Jerusalem is where Jesus appeared when he rose from the dead. In spite of the darkness of this city, Jerusalem is such a glorious city that it is used as the picture of God's eternal kingdom of heaven. The writer to the Hebrews says,

You have not come to a mountain that cannot be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm...22But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn,

Jerusalem is a place of life.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you. 1 Pet 1:3,4

Reminiscent of the verse which says that the leaders of Jerusalem were responsible for the death of the prophets from Abel to Zechariah, first to last, Jesus says in Revelation:

"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! Rev 1:17

The greatest hope and comfort that believers in Jesus have is knowing that death will not destroy us, but that the death of our earthly bodies is only the passageway into eternal life. Our Savior says,

*Because I live, you also will live. **John 14:19** and*

*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. **Rev 2:10***

Jerusalem had proven itself to be the City of Death. That certainly is not an attractive name to draw visitors and tourists. What is important is that Jesus our Savior was drawn to Jerusalem to fulfill our Father's will, to accomplish our salvation. Neither the temptations of Satan, nor the threats of Herod, nor the fear of suffering and death, would keep Jesus from going to Jerusalem.

There he died. But at Jerusalem he rose again from the dead. And so during the season of Lent we also walk with Jesus to Jerusalem ... because He has made it the City of Life, everlasting Life.

Amen