

March 13, 2022
Second Sunday in Lent

“Words from Jesus”

Luke 13:31-35

At the end of our short Gospel reading today Jesus says this: *“And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”*

This isn’t just some phrase Jesus pulls out of thin air. Jesus is actually quoting the greeting the people in Jerusalem would say to those arriving at the city to celebrate one of the sacred festivals like Passover: *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”*

But the truth is that when the Messiah, the one to whom Jerusalem should indeed speak this blessing finally arrives, they have no words of blessing. They reject Him and scream “Crucify Him” instead.

Jesus knows this is the case and mourns and laments the fact. *“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.”*

And there is the curse upon Jerusalem. It is the city King David founded; the king whose dream was to build the temple, the house of the Lord where the name of the Lord would dwell in the midst of His people. But God has arrived in Christ Jesus bringing salvation and the city and the temple shall reject Him. Thus the temple shall no longer be God’s house. Jesus now calls it “your house,” and it is desolate of the presence of God.

Hear the utter tragedy in Jesus’ words: *“How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings...”* The God of love and mercy longed to gather His people to Himself, to care for them as a parent cares for a child, to be nothing but good to them. Despite all of their rebellion, God wanted to receive their repentance, forgive them and simply be their God dwelling with His people.

Such love of God, followed by four awful words of condemnation: *“and you would not.”*

Unfortunately, things haven’t changed a whole lot on the other side of the cross. We don’t have mammoth stone temples anymore. We have churches where baptized believers, people St. Paul refers to as “temples of the Holy Spirit” gather for worship. We, the unified body of Christ, gather to hear God’s Word, receive His good Gospel gifts in Christ and return prayer, praise and thanksgiving in response. God is here as a loving Father, eager to receive our repentance, forgive us and be nothing but good to us.

Yet we all know a bunch of folks who have been baptized, have heard the Gospel, who know the gifts God longs to give them, but they’re a no-show here. They’ve got all sorts of reasons and rationalizations about why they stay away, but none of them amount to a hill of beans in the face of God saying “and you would not.”

That’s a tragedy. If you have the opportunity to have a conversation with some of those folks you might want to make a note of this short Gospel reading. It’s powerful. Jesus speaks God’s Gospel love and then nullifies it with those simple words, “and you would not.” So many folks stand in the condemnation of those words and maybe if you pointed it out to them, well, maybe they wouldn’t be so comfortable there.

But we’re in Lent, and this is a special time of self-examination. And we aren’t exempt from grave error simply because we show up for church services. After all, St. Paul was talking about folks who had been in the church when he says, *“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.”* And let us not forget, it was the church folk—

the priests, Pharisees and leaders of the Jews—who despised and conspired against Jesus because they were so sure of their own piety and righteousness.

So in light of the severe gravity of Jesus' words, I think it behooves us to examine our own fallen self and ask, "Is there some part of me, some part of my life where it could be said of me in light of Christ's loving call in the Gospel, 'and you would not'?" If you're honest about asking this question, you really might not like what you find.

Are you cheating on your spouse—in reality or in the pornography of cyberspace? And are you going to continue without a struggle, without a thought toward repentance and change because of the physical pleasure to be had? If so, isn't that refusal to repent and be forgiven a clear indication of "and you would not"? That should really scare you...because remaining on that course another applicable word from Christ might be, "Behold, your house is forsaken"—your temple of the Holy Spirit vacated.

So, yeah, like that you may find base and depraved sins you need to face and come to repentance.

But considering who Jesus aimed these words at...well, Jerusalem itself as a whole...but it was kind of led down this road by the good church folk, maybe we should particularly look at their behavior and check for that in ourselves. They didn't reject Christ on the basis of willful, depraved sins. Theirs were more sins of self-idolatry.

They were proud and self righteous, counting themselves above others because of their good works and church membership and rank. They lacked humility—these are the ones Jesus criticized as hypocrites because of their showy public giving, prayers and fasting. These are the ones who stood in judgment of others and easily slandered those they thought beneath themselves. These are the ones who thought they merited the favor of God and men. These are the ones who refused to follow Jesus because to do so meant to step down from their lofty perch and serve and count others more significant than themselves.

In short, these guys had an attitude. It's often the church folks that do.

It's kind of understandable. If we're trying to do the faith rightly we're generally being pretty good people in the eyes of society. We don't do really "bad" stuff like we read about in the news. We aren't real jerks to folks like others we see when we're out and about. Some of us even regularly use our turn signals. So before men we can begin feeling pretty good about ourselves. Plus we give of our firstfruits to the church, regularly attend services and even volunteer our time and talents to the congregation so before God we might start feeling pretty good also.

But while that feels good, it's not good. You cannot find a single verse in Scripture that describes pride in a good light. You cannot find a single instance in the Gospels where our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ exhibited pride—even after His resurrection. Glory, yes, and well deserved. Pride, no.

Yet we church folks can easily walk down this road...and feel good about it as we do. Then when the Holy Spirit comes near prompting us to humble ourselves, serve in some lowly fashion, quietly accept the offense of another, lovingly bear another's burden, sacrifice of ourselves—in other words when we are called to be Christ-like in lowly meekness..."And you would not."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we must beware of this. We are not good church folk. We have no righteousness of our own. It is only by the grace of the only righteous one acting in lowly, humble service unto death that He has gathered His children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. We must continually be looking to His sacrifice and be humbled by His love for us. In this we repent of any thought, word or action which would give Him cause to say, "and you would not."

Instead, we drop all pride, all standing, all claims of goodness by our own work and beg His pardon. We turn to our Holy Baptism, turn to the Holy Supper, turn to the Word of the Gospel and see our Savior of all honor, majesty and glory giving us the fruits of His humble service, the forgiveness of

even our sins of pride and welcoming us to His house, saying to us, "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*" Amen.