

March 16, 2025  
Third Sunday in Lent

“Open to His Leading”

Luke 13:31-35

There is a theme that runs through our readings today, and it's one that should be kind of disturbing for us, the churchgoing Christians. In our reading from Jeremiah, it's the priests and supposed prophets and churchgoing people who reject God's Word spoken to them through His prophet. In Paul's letter to the Philippian church, it's likely the pious, churchgoing Jews who are walking "*as enemies of the cross of Christ*." In the Gospel lesson it is Jerusalem, the holy city where the temple of Yahweh is located, that Jesus says will not only reject Him, but kill Him. This will take place, and it's the religious people that pull the trigger on the murder plot against Christ. The church folk don't look too good.

This should be disturbing to us because, let's face it, in a lot of ways we're a lot like those guys at the ancient temple. They knew how things were. They had the Torah and their understanding of it. They had the temple and the prescribed rituals performed there. They did the Yahweh worship thing and thus proved themselves to be sons of Abraham; God's chosen people.

We know how things are. Many of us grew up and were confirmed in the Lutheran Church. Others took the New Member course. We all know the Small Catechism. We understand our oh-so-well-researched Lutheran doctrine. We come to God's house and do our rituals and the Lord's Supper. We are Christians; God's chosen people. See the similarities?

And please do not take this as me saying what happens here is empty and without meaning and effect. The Divine Service is all about God's gifts being given in Word and Sacrament and we, His people, rightly returning prayer, praise and thanksgiving. Jesus is here with us, even physically in the Holy Supper for the forgiveness of all our sins.

My point is that when a new thing of God and His Word arrived on the scene demanding a change or right refocusing of faith, it was rejected. Jeremiah was rejected. Jesus was rejected. The Gospel was rejected. God's action in His Word or in that Word made flesh came near and tried to shake things up, and the "people of God" refused to be shaken because they know how things are. They're doing it right.

A good question to ask yourself in light of this during this reflective and penitential time of Lent might be this; "Am I willing and able to be shaken up by Christ coming close to me in His Word?"

There is a danger in thinking that you are doing the faith right. That danger is that you stop considering the possibility that you are not doing it right. If that becomes the case, then when the Holy Spirit working through the Word calls you to step out in another direction, well, you're not going to, because you're already doing it right—no need to upset the apple cart. So you need to force yourself to step back, admit that in your brokenness you can do nothing right apart from Jesus, and in that truth constantly be examining yourself by His Word, struggling to see where He may be guiding you.

A big note here is that while you cannot do it right, Jesus has and always is doing it perfectly. This exhortation is not reason for doubt about the efficacy of His salvation for you. Forgiveness of sins is indeed always there for the faithful penitent in the Word, Holy Baptism and the Holy Supper. And while yes, someone thinking they do the faith right can lead to self-righteousness that forgoes faith in Christ's merit, I trust that's not anyone here. What I'm talking about is resisting the leading of the Spirit toward a change because one thinks one doesn't need to.

Example? Well, I think about compassion. If we think we're doing the faith right it's pretty easy to do your own life and look right past the hurting and needy around you. There's no need; you're doing it right. But if you're open to the Word, when you hear Jesus talking about the judgment and how the blessed fed Him and clothed Him and visited Him, you're open to hearing the Spirit speak about how you perceive the folks in need around you.

Forgiveness is another area this comes into play. If you think you're doing faith right, are you really going to be all that concerned about your offenses against someone else, or are you going to think it's all fine because you're forgiven? You can let it slide and they'll get over it. But by not asking their pardon that person is denied the chance to forgive you...as they should under Christ. It can go the other way also. If you're doing the faith right things are fine, so maybe forgiving others isn't much of a priority. You say the phrase "as I forgive those who trespass against me..." in the Lord's Prayer...and that's enough; no need to really think on it.

Which leads us to why one might not ask forgiveness or forgive—pride. If one thinks one is doing the faith right, isn't one going to take pride in that? I'm a good Lutheran! Whoa...there's a red flag! That phrase screams that you need to sit down, read and ponder some of God's Word and let it remind you how fallen you are and how gracious and good God is to you and get yourself humbled.

Folks, if we think we're doing the faith right it's a pretty good indication we're closing ourselves off to God speaking anything different. Each one of us should, outside of this Divine Service, be reading Holy Scripture and then pausing and contemplating the Word, praying for God to speak to us and help us cling to Him better and follow His leading.

I say this because Jesus' words are both comforting and frightening: *"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."*

This is comforting because the picture of a hen gathering her chicks evokes the image of tender, parental love—such love amplified in divine perfection is God's attitude toward us. And despite our sins He calls us to Himself!

Yet God's people rejected this loving call. "You would not!" Jerusalem was so steeped in its own way of doing things, its own self-righteous pride, its selfish joy in thinking itself so special that when the new thing God was doing in the Messiah came to them, they wanted nothing to do with it. They rejected and destroyed it. They rejected and destroyed Him.

So *"Your house is forsaken."* Note the horrible change there. Jerusalem the city of God's house, the temple. No longer. They'd kicked God out in favor of what they desired God to be; a god created in their image where they were doing the faith right. In the end God did the terrible thing that He does sometimes—let them have what they wanted. They didn't kick God out; He left them to themselves. By their own choice and fault, they stood forsaken.

But God is gracious. The Messiah they thought they'd killed rose from the dead and established His church by His Gospel of forgiveness. Once again the call went forth to all peoples to turn, repent, receive the Gospel, be forgiven and forever be the people of God!

That Gospel still calls and speaks to you. It's not a word you once studied and now you have it down pat so you're good to go and do the faith right. As Hebrews says, *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."*

By the power of the Holy Spirit you are the people of God and thus your body is now His temple—not your temple—His! This is a very good thing. It is this way because Jesus did the faith right unto death and resurrection to save you! Focused on Him, your piety is a meager offering to the loving God who pulls you from the abyss. But He is so good that it's a joy to give Him all honor and praise leaving nothing for yourself.

So pay heed to what Scripture clearly shows. Gracious God comes to His people with healing in His wings, but sometimes in ways that shake up our status quo, our thinking and our life. But He is always good for us. Don't be so full of yourself that you won't hear Him when He calls just because it doesn't fit with the spiritual model of the faith you've built.

He calls to you. He gathers you. He loves you. You are his temple, and His house is not forsaken, it's forever.

Amen.