

“Jesus and Herod”

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First Presbyterian Church
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New Testament Lesson: Luke 13:31-35

Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 36:5-9

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. Jesus, gathering God’s children under his wings. I really like that. Have you ever felt so loved and protected? You know, it wasn’t so long ago in the church year that we saw Mary wrap the baby Jesus in swaddling clothes, like a hen nestling her baby under her wings. We all want to feel that warm and safe in life. And thank God for those times when we do. But what about those times when we don’t.

Are there times when that feeling of love and protection and spiritual warmth and safety leave you? Sure there are. Think about it. Why is that? If in fact God’s love for us “extends to the heavens” as our Old Testament reading assures us it does, then why are there times when we don’t feel it?

That’s what today’s sermon is all about – our undying faith in God’s love for us AND those times when we’re just not feelin’ it. Wouldn’t we all like to have that feeling of God’s love and protection never leave us!?! Of course we would. And we can. Jesus shows us that.

In today’s New Testament reading, Jesus shows us five steps in helping to ensure that we always feel God’s love and protection surrounding us, like “a hen (gathering) her brood under her wings.” Jesus gets a death threat, with the Pharisees coming to him and saying, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” And the first thing Jesus does is pause to evaluate the situation. He doesn’t immediately act on their threat, neither running away from Herod nor attacking him. Instead, Jesus says to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.’” By calling Herod a “fox,” Jesus is showing that he knows exactly what’s going on here. He knows that Herod is cunning like a fox. Jesus also knows that Herod is not his king, that he’s no royal lion, so to speak, but a small fox – just one of God’s creatures on equal standing with everyone else in the eyes of God.

So, the first step in being better able to feel God’s love and protection even when you’re feeling threatened is to **evaluate the situation**. Is what’s happening to you coming from God, from a place of truth and love – divine truth and tough love? Or is what’s happening to you based in fear? If the pressure is coming from God, then the best thing for us to do is repent, turn from our old ways and seek the support of those you see to be aligned with God’s spirit of love and hope and peace, whoever they are. However, if the pressure in a given situation is not from God – if it is a spirit contrary to the spirit of love and hope and peace – then the answer is the same – we still turn away from fear and move toward love.

Now, actually getting to that place of love is not the next step Jesus shows us. He gets us there – don't get me wrong. Jesus is always in a place of love, always moving toward ever brighter and warmer love. But the next step in getting to that place is ***continuing to do what you know is right.***

If you are certain in your heart of hearts that you are on the side of divine truth, and those who God has raised up around you agree, then don't let any fear or pressure keep you from living into that truth.

Or, as Jesus puts it, "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work." Jesus isn't going to let a death threat keep him from doing the work of God.

Likewise, God has given you a special role to perform, - in your family, at your workplace, among your friends and through your church. And everyday you wake up you face the possibility that someone or something may get in the way of what God is calling to do of who God is calling you to be as brother or sister in Christ.

But that's no reason to not do the work of God, in the spirit of Christ. There is no doubt that God's will will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

So even if you feel overcome by evil forces, don't let that stop you. Don't let that worry you, as best you can. And certainly, don't let that turn you toward the darkside, as a different Luke, Luke Skywalker would say. He's not an apostle he's from Star Wars, but it seems to fit – "Go toward the light.")

For us to go toward the light, we need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Jesus didn't run away and Jesus didn't attack. Instead, the third thing Jesus did – after, first, evaluating the situation and then staying focused on his work, on God's work – the third thing Jesus did was put himself in the shoes of the other person and the broken world. ***Have sympathy, empathy.***

"... It is impossible," says Jesus, "for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem." It doesn't sound like sympathy, yet it does acknowledge that Jerusalem can't help itself. Jesus knows that when it comes to Jerusalem, it's just in its nature to kill prophets, and still he has sympathy, we have sympathy. And from sympathy, come love and prayer. The strongest way for us to respond when the world is hell-bent against us is in love, and in prayer.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" That sounds like a prayer to me. That sounds like love to me.

The fourth step is to ***respond in love and prayer.*** Turn a compassionate heart toward a cold, hard world and pray. Now this doesn't mean giving in or resigning yourself to defeat.

We see this when Jesus speaks the truth in love to Jerusalem, the city that will put him to death. He says, I desired to gather you together as children of God and you were not willing.

Still, says Jesus, I love you. Still, I want only what's best for you. And so, says Jesus, I must tell you that you are your own worst enemy – “you (are) not willing” to accept the love of God, the embodiment of God's will, Jesus, the Christ.

Speaking the truth in love – that, my friends, is just about the best we can do in such any such situation. First, evaluate what's happening; second, continue doing God's work; third, put yourself in the other person's shoes – have sympathy for their situation. And fourth, pray for them.

But wait, I said Jesus gives us five steps in helping to ensure we always feel God's love and protection surrounding us, five steps in always having that divine sense of spiritual warmth and safety, like “a hen (gathering) her brood under her wings.”

The fifth and most important step ***is trusting in God***. Jesus says to his attackers, “... You will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Jesus knows God's plan and purpose will win out! And so do we, as long as we stay focused on doing God's work. Notice that not only do God and God's people win the ultimate victory, but even those who wake up and find themselves tragically opposed to God's plan and purpose – even they have hope. Even they can count on seeing God's victory. Even they can turn to God and say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” Even they can become followers of Jesus.

So, don't let any momentary battle you may find yourself in shake your faith in God's ultimate victory, and in God's grace and mercy. God's grace and mercy bring all to the throne of God to kneel in the light of the Lord, at least all who are willing to seek the Lord and turn toward the light.

As Christians in a world so often opposed to God's will and God's way, we are called to be a channel of God's grace and mercy, even as we stand firm in doing God's work.

If you find yourself struggling to do God's will, evaluate the situation and if it's you who needs to change, do it then stay focused on God, have sympathy for the world around you, and lift it all up in prayer and love, trusting always in God. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Holy and merciful God, we thank you for the gifts of the season of Lent.

Thank you for the call to slow down, to quiet the voices that vie for our attention. Help us to be still and to enjoy the presence of your Spirit.

Thank you for the invitation to examine our hearts and lives, to take stock of our relationships, our loves and our fears.

Grant us courage to address the stumbling-blocks that pop up in our lives, getting in the way of our closeness to you.

We want to be close to you, Lord, and have nothing stand in our way. We pray for those who are recovering from illnesses and surgeries, that the way would be clear for stored health – and especially for Emily Johnson, Mary Havenhill, and Steven Fitzpatrick.

Lord God, we thank you for showing us the way to new life and new beginnings, the way of Jesus Christ, the way of the cross.

Help us to remember his ways, just as we remember his words, when he taught us to pray saying together,

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we
forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever.
Amen.**