The Ongoing Ministry and Compassion of Jesus

Hello friends. Thanks for listening today. Welcome to the 2nd Sunday of Easter Preparation. Our Revised Common Lectionary passage comes from Luke 13:31-35, a text that reminds of Jesus’ daily ministry in the face of his approaching passion.\*

*At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.”**He said 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. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’*

*\* 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! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”*

Let’s start with some context. \*In Luke 9:51, Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem where he knew that he would face opposition from religious leaders and eventually his death. Along the way, he demonstrates the presence of God’s kingdom through repeated deliverance from demons and healing from sickness. \*These signs and miracles create an opening in the minds and hearts of many who witness them. Jesus teaches the crowds of people from Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem, revealing the heavenly Father. He shares the good news of his amazing love and offer of salvation for all. He offers true freedom, spiritual healing and deliverance. \*As Mark 1:14-15 says, Jesus proclaimed the gospel (good news) of God, saying

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand [come near]; repent and believe the gospel.”*

Jesus was the presence of God’s kingdom among them, and crowds of people followed him along his journey.

If you want to imagine this in today’s world, \*Jesus might have a huge social media following who track his journey on foot from Galilee to Jerusalem. Perhaps they would turn out to see him in person as he passed near their town. \*Wherever Jesus goes, he brings signs of God’s kingdom. He IS God’s kingdom on earth at that time. \*And he IS God’s kingdom here and now as he lives through us in the Holy Spirit, leading, empowering us to embody his loving presence in this troubled world. More on that later…

Verses 31 of our passage says,\*

*At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.”*

So here’s Jesus, doing his work on the way to Jerusalem, where he knows he will die. The Pharisees come along and warn him to run, because the same Herod who chopped off the head of John the Baptist’s wants to kill him. Now the passage doesn’t reveal the motivation of the Pharisees here. There were some converts among the Pharisees who might have sincerely wanted to warn Jesus. Or it could have been that this warning was from the jealous Pharisees who wanted to scare Jesus off their turf. We really don’t know. Whatever the case, Jesus replies,

 *“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.*

In other words, “I’m operating by my own timetable, not yours.” Herod has no power over Jesus or his ministry—it’s the Father’s work and no man can stop it. Today and tomorrow Jesus will continue his daily work, and Jesus is the one who will complete that work. It will be completed on the third day. The third day is an allusion to Jesus’ resurrection, when his **physical** mission on earth is completed.

What a powerful reminder to us as we participate in Jesus’ ongoing ministry even right now. God’s work is not subject to human power. It will not stop for ANY reason because it’s GOD’S work.

\*Are we desperately running to every corner of the globe trying to bring the gospel to every person of every nation so that the end can come? Such an effort, while noble, would indicate that we think WE are in charge, that it’s our work and not God’s. God’s work doesn’t depend on our success.

\*Are we discouraged when our friends and relatives don’t want to hear the gospel? Absolutely. But God’s timetable doesn’t look like ours. We don’t see what he sees. We can, however, count on his loving desire that ALL men come to repentance and be saved. And he will redeem everything for good IN HIS TIME, the very best time.

Craig showed me a news article about Zhou Jinxia, a Christian woman in northeast China, who has been arrested—again—for proselytizing. That comes as no surprise to family and friends, who call her “unbreakable” and “irrepressible.”

More than 50 times, Zhou has attempted to share the Gospel message with \*Chinese President Xi Jinping and his wife. The result? Repeated arrests and detentions—and now a growing notoriety that some people fear could result in longer imprisonment.

\*Using placards filled with Gospel messages, Zhou regularly stands outside a gated area in Beijing where top Chinese Communist Party officials reside. On February 20, she stood there again to greet President Xi when he returned from the Winter Olympics. This led to her arrest for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” Zhou “concluded that no solution to China’s problem[s] would be possible unless [the president and his wife] would receive God in their hearts.”

One of her placards reads, “God loves the people of the world and is calling out to Xi Jinping and Peng Liyuan. Atheism nurtures sin and brings down the people. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand; you should repent.”

What an amazing witness this lady is, yet it seems that this is not God’s timing for President Xi’s conversion.

Verse 33 repeats Jesus’ point that his ministry must and will continue:\*

***Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.****’*

Even today, Jesus’ ministry must continue as his followers participate in the work he has already prepared in advance for them to do.

\*Now verse 34-35:

*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! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, 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 is headed towards the historic seat of Jewish power in Jerusalem where both kings and priests have their home. Prophetic ministry in the face of power is a dangerous activity. It jeopardizes the lives of those who would speak the truth of God’s kingdom to the powers that be. Jesus is no exception.

But what is surprising is Jesus’ reaction. He characterizes the city as killing prophets and apostles (“those who are sent,”), but his response is the **compassion** of a mother. Jesus longs to gather Jerusalem under his wings (v. 34). Jesus longs to comfort those who would reject him. \*He envisions Jerusalem as a brood of vulnerable chicks in need of their mother’s protection and longs to offer the same protection, salvation, to the very city where he will die. \*Unfortunately, Jerusalem also has a longing. The city does not want to be gathered under the salvation of Jesus. What a tragedy. They rejected God’s grace IN PERSON, the person of Christ.

What agony Jesus experiences over this, \*even crying over Jerusalem, as we read in Luke 19:41. So great is his care and compassion even towards his enemies.

What a powerful example for us. As Christ followers, we should be known for our compassion, even towards those who might be considered our enemies.

\*Today our news reports are filled with horrible photos of human suffering at the hands of Russian President Vladimir Putin. I don’t know about you, but tears come to my eyes when I see these photos. So does anger.

\*I just finished an excellent historical novel about the Nazi occupation of Holland during the second world war. The author follows the lives of three women—one a Jew, one a farmer, one a young woman. These women each wrestle with their faith in the face of great suffering during the 5-year Nazi occupation. One character in particular—Lena-- struggles with anger as her husband disappears to assist the Resistance movement. Her teenaged son is captured by the Nazis and her daughter is arrested and endures unthinkable horrors in prison. Lena’s crops are confiscated by the enemy, and her father, the local pastor, volunteers to be shot as the Nazis demand someone be killed as retribution for one of their own dying. She hides Jews on her farm and tries to keep everyone fed as food runs out all over the country and in her coffers.

Near the end of the story, Lena takes her 2 small daughters on her rickety bicycle to town to trade a bit of milk for some bread. On their way home, they come across a lone Nazi soldier gazing across her fields. Lena decides that since there’s no way she can avoid him, she will confront him alone and leave her daughters with the bicycle to make a hasty escape if needed. She approaches and yells at him in Dutch, “What are you doing here? You’re trespassing on my property! Haven’t you Nazis wrecked my life enough? Can’t you leave us alone.” The soldier turns, and Lena sees it’s a young man, perhaps 20 years old, and he’s been crying. He speaks in German, “Please forgive me for bothering you. You see, I miss my mother and our farm so much. It’s been so long, and I hate this war. I thought that if I could just get a way for a few minutes and smell and see the fields, I might feel better.” Lena’s anger dissolved as she replied in German, “Can I give you a hug, for your mother?” She hugged that Nazi soldier, and they both went on their way with tears in their eyes.

\*Jesus tells us to LOVE our enemies. This is a hard thing. And as Lister Chen reminded us in our weekly prayer meeting, we need to pray for our enemies. This is an important way to love them.

Yes, we need to pray for peace, pray for the suffering, while entrusting them to God. But we also need to pray for our enemies knowing that His salvation is for ALL. May they come to understand the gospel, the love embodied in our Savior Jesus. He went to the cross for everyone and rose from the dead victorious over sin and death. Keep praying for all our world leaders. Pray for the enemies, trusting that God’s timing is always best. Verse 35\*

***See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.****’”*

Jerusalem’s refusal to be gathered by Jesus is not without consequences. The city is described as abandoned and unable to see Jesus until the day when they receive “the one who comes in the name of the Lord” as is says in Psalm 118.

Although a large crowd of Jesus’ disciples will shout this same passage when Jesus rides into Jerusalem, Jerusalem itself will become the place of Jesus’ death. Those who reject Jesus’ compassionate offer of salvation, deliverance, and healing, find their city rejected, abandoned, and left to its own devices.

The same is true for those who choose to reject Jesus’ ministry and message today. There will be consequences. Jesus’ longing is to have compassion, but his longing must be met by our own longing for salvation, deliverance, and healing.

There are two things I hope you will remember from this message today:

First, **the ongoing ministry of Jesus is not subject to the powers of this world**. The gospel will be preached, and not by our power or efforts. But we are invited to participate in Christ’s ongoing work as he is drawing all people to himself, into relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We participate by telling those who are ready to hear how Jesus has saved us, transformed us. We participate in Jesus’ work by showing his love and grace as we serve others, loving and praying even for our enemies.

Second, I hope you will **remember Jesus’ compassion**—the compassion of the Father, Son and Spirit. He wants to gather everyone under his wings, to love and protect and deliver despite being rejected by the ones he came to save.

In *Clean Jokes and Inspirational Stories*, Rod Dykstra tells about a \*successful young executive who was driving through a neighborhood in his new Jaguar. Suddenly a rock smashed into the side of his car. He slammed on his brakes and jumped out to confront a guilty-looking small boy standing nearby.

“Who are you and what is going on here?” yelled the executive. “This is a new car and what you just did is gonna cost you a lot of money. Why did you throw that rock?”

The boy was apologetic and said, “Please mister, I am sorry. I didn’t know what else to do. I threw the rock because no one else would stop. With tears streaming down his face, he pointed to a person lying on the ground by the parked car. “It’s my brother,” he said, “and he rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and I can’t lift him up. He is hurt and is too heavy for me. Would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair?”

Now moved beyond words, the driver lifted the handicapped boy back into the wheelchair. He took out his handkerchief and dabbed gently at the fresh scrapes and cuts. A quick look told him that everything was going to be okay. He never did get the dent in his car repaired. He left it there to remind himself that he should not journey through life without helping others.

\*Again, the church is called to bear witness to Jesus (Acts 1:8). We proclaim who he is and what he has done for us, sharing the gospel message. We embody that Godly love it in ongoing acts of compassion, mercy and forgiveness. And we invite others to join us as followers who are being transformed into his likeness day by day.

Let’s continue to participate in Jesus’ ongoing ministry and mission in the world, praying for our enemies and following the lead of the Holy Spirit in compassionately loving ALL who bear God’s image.