

Luke 13:31-35
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"To Be Continued..."

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Most cities have at least two reputations, one they plaster all over the visitors guide hoping it will make the city inviting as a travel destination, and a second reputation they often try to hide because of the ugliness. Of course these are just the best and the worst of a city, and they are generalizations. Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love, sorry sisters; Yet, it also has the reputation of having some of the meanest sports fans. Paris, France known as the city of love; and the city where residents are rude to you if you don't speak French. New York is sometimes called the capital of the world; yet, has a reputation for being crime ridden. Visit Milwaukee bids our nearest city as "A Great Place by the Lake," yet Milwaukee is one of the most segregated cities in the US.

Jerusalem had reputations too. It was a large enough city to be spiritually significant to Jews, Muslims and Christians; and yet, known as the land of secular religion. A commercial capital where you were defined by what you owned. Your value was determined by your rank in society. The residents had great desire and capacity to acquire things which often led to a spiritual malnutrition.

Today we hear Jesus agonize over what Jerusalem has become. Corruption, commercialization, and half-hearted faith. Luke's story breaks our hearts. This story is difficult for us on several levels. First, it is difficult because many of us mourn for a city alongside Jesus, be it the city of Milwaukee or any city we hold dear in our heart. That's hard! It is hard to see a place we love have to suffer because it means real people, with real lives are suffering, yet we sense a great potential that seems to lie within any city.

Secondly, this story is difficult because when we become sorrowful about a city's suffering; we hope to turn to Jesus, the source of our hope, joy, and promised redemption to restore our hope. So today, to turn and see him sorrowful also... might leave us unsure where to turn.

Third, as a preacher I wonder where is the good news in a text like this for all of us who gather at Emanuel this morning? Where is there any hope, joy, or promised redemption?"

We wonder, is this one of those times we are to just sit by Jesus' side and cry along with our Savior? Not sure how to respond to Jesus' sorrow, that is tough too. Sometimes all we can do is hang on beside him and trust he will offer some hope soon.

So, if today is one of your first visits to Emanuel; you finally said yes to a friend's invitation to come to worship, or you walked through the doors thinking you would "check this church out." If you are here today looking for good news. Today is what I identify as a 'stick around' Sunday. As consumers of entertainment it is our temptation to change the channel when the show we are watching goes the direction we don't like. But worship of God is different.

In our gathering we remember... the city holds a prominent place in the bible. Our holy book refers to God's home in heaven as a city. The history of religion reminds us of the significant role Jerusalem, and other cities have played in the development of Judaism and Christianity. Cities are important to our faith.

Today Jesus looks at the city through our own foggy, frazzled glasses, and like us, his heart breaks open because he sees what we see... agony and suffering.

The themes of agony and suffering have an interesting history in the church. The Greek Philosopher Aristotle spoke of God as "the Unmoved Mover." And for many centuries this thought framed much of the churches approach to suffering. The church thought of God as immoble, callous, wooden, poker-faced and unemotional – the opposite of compassionate and empathetic—we thought God did not experience agony or suffering.

A closer look at the bible offers another way to picture God as one who suffers with us in our trying moments. God's intimate, interconnected love means God experiences our pain and disappointment. God shares in the struggles of each creature and every community. It is why we have a story about Jesus, God with us, mourning the failings of Jerusalem.

God enters our pain first to accompany and comfort us. Yet through God's presence seeds are sewn which, in due time, bloom restoring us to new life. God enters beside us, planting seeds which form a path to the justice that rolls down like water, and righteousness that flows like an ever-flowing stream, a path to the humble journey with God, into restored life.

In God's presence with us we experience divine tenderness. I am not sure there is very much tenderness in the world today, but it is a gift of God to us and as with all of God's gifts it is to be shared with others. We meet God's kindness and gentleness in the face of our sorrow, loss, grief, struggle, and pain.

So today is a stick around Sunday, if you leave feeling a little uneasy, its ok; come back. I promise you will receive good news. How do I know good news is coming? It is planted deep in the soil of our story today. Good news is coming because Jesus is here. If you need him even right now, he is here in worship with us, sitting beside you, part of every breath you take in, ready to lead you to new life.

Secondly, the seeds are planted in this image of Jesus as the ever-ready, Mother hen, "Jerusalem, how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing." Like many animal mothers, Hens can be ferocious animals when they fear an attack upon their young... A mother hen is known to extend her wings over the chicks in an almost umbrella like fashion. She makes aggressive noises and actions with her head to ward off the intruder or at least warn them that she means business. And she will die fighting to protect her brood. Under the wings of a mother hen is a place of protection and refuge.

Jesus announces that he wants to gather the people of Jerusalem or San Juan Puerto Rico, or Milwaukee, or Detroit, or Tijuana, Mexico, or Pine Ridge, South Dakota, or Daraa, Syria, or wherever... Jesus' wings are open world-wide.

And this story will be continued... in a few weeks we will hear again how the Mother hen will ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. She will be murdered on a cross but three days later, her tomb will be empty. Then one more identity will be added to every address in every city and place. A whole new reputation for all, you are a member of the body of Christ.

Amen.