

“Required”

Pastor Barbara Edema, Bridge Pastor
Sunday, March 17, 2019

Luke 13:31-35

There is so much packed into these five verses. I could have written several sermons and we could have been here all day long. However, I chose not to do that. I'm just going to cram as much as I can into this one sermon. Here are some of the themes:

Jesus is on his journey to Jerusalem to die.

Surprisingly, there are some nice Pharisees who try to warn Jesus about Bad Guy Herod.

Bad Guy Herod is in charge of the territory held by the Romans and wants to kill Jesus. Herod's backstory...

Jesus laments the unrequited love he has for Jerusalem.

There are animals. A fox and some chickens.

The Pharisees, who have taken a short hiatus from despising Jesus, come to him and warn him to stay away from Jerusalem. "Herod is going to kill you. Go anywhere but Jerusalem."

Little did they know, Jerusalem was precisely where Jesus was going. Jerusalem was the only place Jesus could go. He had brought the beautiful and redeeming Kingdom of God to the people of God. Jerusalem was the bloody bow on the gift.

Jesus' entire ministry was one of new laws, new rules, and a new world. Wicked Roman leaders tried to subdue and control the people. Pharisees and Sadducees held the Jews under strict Jewish law.

Jesus came and said, "We are done with the cruelty of corrupt leaders. We are finished with laws that keep your souls overburdened instead of free to live in peace, grace and forgiveness."

Consider these contrasts: Jesus has disciples, Herod has soldiers. Jesus serves, Herod rules. Jesus prays for his enemies, Herod kills his. A fox and a mother hen. Who do you think would win this fight?

But for all this great change and hope for God's people, Jerusalem is the place where many of God's prophets have shown up with a message and were found dead shortly thereafter.

Jesus laments. Jesus loves Jerusalem, even though it will be the place he also dies. Like the prophets before him, his love will be unrequited and he, too, will be dead shortly thereafter.

As he laments, he says, "How often I have desired to gather your children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings." *How often I have desired.* Desired. That's a strong word. And it's a rare word in the Gospel of Luke, appearing only one other time when Jesus is the subject. *I desire.* This phrase is pointing us to something significant about Jesus' character. Jesus yearns deeply to gather us. With great feeling, great longing, Jesus seeks to gather us to himself, to bring us close, hold us, shelter us, keep us. It is a desire for an intimate relation with us.

How do you feel when you hear those words? Jesus desires to have an intimate relationship with us? We are desired. We are wanted. We are worthy to be loved by Jesus Christ.

This text shows that, in Jesus, God is close and God is desiring us, as if there is something in the very nature of God that is completed in us, something in God that is fulfilled by being in relationship with us.

As Jesus laments, he compares the love he has for his people with a mother hen. I have seen chickens while living in or travelling through developing countries. Not caged chickens. Chickens who are free to roam which can lead to their own peril.

I've preached before about Bawjiase, Ghana where our daughter lived for over two years. Instead of talking about her, I would like to talk about chickens. Walking back and forth from the orphanage, I saw many mama chickens with their broods of chicks. They scurried and pecked and clucked and peeped. These baby chicks were so vulnerable to the dogs, cats, giant rats, and snakes that roamed the land. Watching several broods of chickens all mingling with one another, I wondered how the chicks knew who their mother was. But one afternoon a thunderstorm quickly gathered itself together and shook the earth. The rain poured down. I watched the mother hen's wings expand and lift as all the babies knew exactly who their mother was and scurried under the safety of her wings. As soon as they were all there – Thwap! The wings came down. They were sort of like army tanks, if army tanks were made of feathers. The chicks were safe and sound.

Jesus was the absolute expert of making an everyday, common happening into a theological truth that was completely comprehensible. Think of these metaphors:

I am the light of the world.

I am the Good Shepherd.

I am the Bread of Life.

I am Living Water.

I am the Gate.

I am the vine and you are the branches.

"Jerusalem...how often I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings." "How often I have desired...."

Jesus Christ desires us. Jesus Christ loves us. Jesus Christ fought a fox like Herod for the sake of the world with no weapon but feathers. Feathers of gentle protection and deep and abiding love.

Yes, the word "desire" is used only one other time with Jesus speaking in Luke's gospel. It is when he is sitting with his disciples at the last supper. He says, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover meal with you" (22:15). He desired to eat with them.

Jesus died after that. But his brood had been protected. He came back to them, because the biggest surprise was that even someone as evil as Herod or Pilate or some of Jesus' own people, could not kill him and think he was gone for good. He returned to his followers and, showed them his scars, and reminded them of how loved they were and the great Good News they were going to share with the world.

That is our message today. Whether we believe it or not, we are deeply and dearly loved by our God. Whether we believe we are worthy or desirable enough- we are desired. If we have wasted any time hiding, making excuses, or just not believing how much we are loved and adored because of our own voices or the voices of others in our heads, we've missed the point of why Jesus came in the first place. A homeless Jew was sent to remind us of this: We are made in the image of God. God called us "good" from the very beginning. And we have the freedom to requite his love. To live in the Good News of safety not just for ourselves but for all. Comfort, you know, feathers and protection and safety and rest and gentle care for all. We have hope to share with the hopeless. Strength to give to the downtrodden. And true love from a Savior who feels suspiciously like a mother hen. And there are no foxes allowed. Evil has no place in this redeemed henhouse. Amen.