

LENT 2C

February 28, 2010

Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ

Genesis 15:1—12, 17—18 Psalm 27 Philippians 3:1—4:1 ***Luke 13:31—35***

A woman one day decided she was going to write a letter to all members of Congress, demanding they pass a bill which, in her words, would correct a serious injustice. One of her friends asked her, “Do you really think this will change anything?” She replied, with more than a touch of smug self-righteousness, “God has called me to prophetic ministry. I am to be the prophetic voice who speaks truth to power, just like the prophets of old.”

I'm not so sure. In today's Gospel Jesus is the prophet. He notes that like the prophets of Israel he speaks tough words about the sad fate that awaits Jerusalem. Jesus foretells a sad future for God's “house,” the beloved temple, the very center of Jerusalem's identity and life. Prophets before had warned of the temple's doom.ⁱ In few places in the Gospels is Jesus more the prophet, in line with the other prophets of Israel, than here in his warnings of doom for God's people. His warnings would come to pass in the cataclysmic destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

Somehow the destiny of God's people is bound with Jesus' destiny. Jesus goes his way of obedience and it will lead to the cross. Jerusalem goes its way of disobedience and it leads to the destruction of the temple.

But note that in our text today Jesus is in conversation with the Pharisees – devout religious leaders of Israel. When King Herod is mentioned, Jesus has nothing but contempt for that “old fox.” Jesus shows no desire to speak to political power mongers. He speaks only to the faithful. He speaks to those who work at worshiping and serving God. He speaks to us.

The majority of prophecies of the prophets of Israel were aimed at Israel. Most of what Jesus said, he said to his own disciples, not to the world in general.

Have you heard the saying, “Those who lives in glass houses shouldn't throw stones?” In short, it means you shouldn't criticize others for being guilty of the very same things of which you, yourself, are guilty. Or, as Jesus put it, “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.”ⁱⁱ

It might be easier this morning if Jesus had used his last days to attack King Herod, to criticize the government and the national economy. No. His last words of judgment and of lament are for us.

Jesus' great lament, toward the end of his earthly ministry as he faces the cross, is for God's people, the faithful who are unfaithful, Israel, the Church, for us.

We are the ones called to be light to a dark world. We are called to be salt. Jesus has said that the world ought to be able to look at us, who claim to be his followers, and see him.

So just how well are we doing that? How well do we reflect the life of Jesus? How well do we tell the story of Jesus?

The church at its best has at least managed to tell the truthful story of Jesus. You're here today, hearing the story of Jesus' lament over Jerusalem, a story that the world can't hear unless it is re-told by ordinary people – people like you and me – in the church.

Thomas G. Long, named in 1996 as one of the 12 most effective preachers in the English-speaking world, said:

Whatever faith we have is there because somebody overcame the reluctance and took the time to speak to us about God. Somebody walked into a Sunday school class or climbed into a pulpit or dropped by your dorm room or sat with you beside the lake at camp or held on to you during a really bad time in your life and talked, maybe stammering, but talked nevertheless, to you about God.

The Old Testament scholar James Sanders dedicated one of his books to some of the people who talked to him honestly about God and the Christian faith. The book, *God Has a Story, Too*, is dedicated to “Sisters Agnes and Iris and my sister, Nell, women who told me the tomb was empty, and Ruth and Joe Brown Love, who told me my head need not be.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In their 1989 book *Resident Aliens*, theologians Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon said: “The only way for the world to know that it is being redeemed is for the church to point to the Redeemer by being a redeemed people.”^{iv} The only way for the world to know that it is the world – namely, fallen, corrupt, yet being saved and redeemed – is through the presence of a being saved and being redeemed community, the church.

They say that salvation must have institutional embodiment, for it is hard to keep so strange a story going, over time, across the generations, when the triumvirate of the government, the economy, and Hollywood have such powerful means of marginalizing such a story. It's hard to envision a new heaven and a new earth, all things restored in Christ, if we do not at least have a glimpse of that future here and now. Left to our own devices, we tend to regard this world with its present princes, powers, and social arrangements as normal.^v

So how are we doing?

As we ponder the state of our church, the quality of our fidelity, we can see why Jesus weeps. The one who was supremely obedient recognizes disobedience. Judgment begins with God's own household.

Sometimes in the church someone asks, "Will Muslims be saved?" That's a rather curious question. Here we are concerned about whether or not God will negatively judge Muslims when, in scripture, when the Lord is in a judgmental mood the judgment is against God's own, judgment against us.

The season of Lent is a time for honesty, truth telling, and introspection. So here we are, following Jesus along his path and, on his way to be faithful in our behalf, he pauses to weep for us.

Perhaps that is one reason why we should be thankful that in this "Service of Worship" we have confessed our sin. We've been given the opportunity, by the church, to confess our sin as a church. And therefore we ought to be even more thankful that Jesus not only judges us; Jesus also weeps for us. The church is not only judged but also loved. Jesus goes to his cross, not condemning us for our myriad of infidelities but rather he dies saying, "Father, forgive them . . ." ^{vi}

Amen.

<1,242 words>

- i Jeremiah 22:5; Ezekiel 8-11)
- ii Matthew 7:5
- iii Thomas G. Long, *Testimony, Talking Ourselves into Being Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 112.
- iv Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 94.
- v William Willimon, “Jesus Weeps for Us” in *Pulpit Resource* 38.1 (January/February/March 2010) (Inver Grove Heights, MN: Logos Productions, Inc., 2010), 40.
- vi This sermon is drawn largely from William Willimon, “Jesus Weeps for Us” in *Pulpit Resource* 38.1 (January/February/March 2010) (Inver Grove Heights, MN: Logos Productions, Inc., 2010), 37-40.