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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY
Second Sunday in Lent (Series C)
February 21, 2016
Text: Luke 13:31–35

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Gospel reading for today from Luke 13:31–35 recounts a crucial moment in the life of our Lord Jesus. He's on the way to Jerusalem. His time walking on this earth is almost finished. The cross and resurrection are not many days away. And the evil forces are working desperately to keep Jesus from fulfilling His divine mission. If Satan can just keep Jesus away from the cross, sin, death, and evil win.

Sadly, the Pharisees, that religiously conservative group of men whom Jesus was always debating, become pawns used by Satan. On the surface, Jesus and the Pharisees would appear to have much in common. But they were bitter rivals. That fact must be kept in mind in order to understand what's happening in today's gospel reading. Let me read for you Luke 11:39–44 in order to show you just how acrimonious this relationship had become. These are the words of Jesus spoken publicly to and about the Pharisee:

Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools!...[W]oe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.

As you can see, the breach between Jesus and the Pharisees is beyond repair. Our Lord can't tolerate self-righteous people who keep others from hearing and receiving God's grace and forgiveness. Greedy fools without the life of God in their hearts and minds. That's what the Pharisees are to Jesus.

In their debates with Jesus, the Pharisees are losing their reputation and prestige before the people. So, it's time to try something different. Theological debates aren't working; maybe a political threat will work. So, they come to Jesus. "Get away from

here, for Herod wants to kill you” (vs. 31). The Pharisees are talking about Herod Antipas the son of Herod the Great, the same ruler who tried to kill Jesus when he was an infant.

Jesus is undeterred. “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course” (vs. 32). Jesus has a course to complete. Political and theological threats aren’t going to keep Him from it. Jesus knows why He was sent by God the Father: to live, die a bloody death, and rise victorious on the third day so that this corrupted creation can be set free from the bondage of sin, death and the devil. That’s the course He must finish.

Last week’s gospel reading from Luke 4 recounted the various temptations the devil hurled at Jesus while He was fasting in the wilderness. The devil’s strategy was to get Jesus to abandon His divinely appointed course of saving the world through faithful, loving obedience to His heavenly Father. If Jesus doesn’t finish the course that leads to Calvary’s hill and Easter empty tomb, He will be disqualified. In the desert temptations, the devil tries to divert Jesus from His course. He’s doing the same thing in today’s reading, only he’s using the Pharisees to do it. Remember Luke writing that the devil left Jesus until an opportune time? This is one of those times.

The Pharisee’s trap is sinister and devilish. If Jesus were to heed their warning He would be a false prophet. When a prophet or for that matter, a pastor is sent by God to perform His sacred will and speak His holy words and he refuses to do so because of the suffering it may cause, that person becomes a false prophet, a false preacher.

“Nevertheless,” Jesus says, “I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem” (vs. 33). Jerusalem is where He must go for there He must die like the other faithful prophets of old. Jerusalem had a reputation of rejecting God’s prophets and teachers. This is one tradition Jesus would follow to its bitter and yet glorious conclusion.

Jesus knows Israel’s sad history of rejecting God’s love and salvation, and it saddens Him deeply. You can hear it in our Lord’s words, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem” (vs. 34). The holy city of God, and yet the unholy city of unbelief. Amazing, isn’t it, how the godly and the ungodly can be so close together. It’s true of the Church today. Faith and unbelief live close beside one another, often within the same heart. “Lord I believe! Help my unbelief!” cried a desperate father in Mark 9:24. Faith and unbelief in the same heart!!

Jesus weeps and groans over our unbelief. Our Lord says, “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” (vs. 34). It’s such a tender and yet tragic picture – a mother hen clucking after her little ones, trying to gather them under her protective wings out of harm’s way, willing to sacrifice herself to save them, and yet they stubbornly refuse. That’s Jesus’ love for Jerusalem, for His Church, for you and me. He longs to gather us under His extended arms. His will is that you be sheltered under the protection of His merciful grace. He’s willing to go to Jerusalem and die for you, for all, even for those who hate Him and who wish Him dead.

Jesus wants us under His protective care. There are no lone rangers in Christ’s Church. No rugged individualists or self-made Christians. Just a brood of helpless hatchlings, baby birds hidden under our Savior’s protective wing. He calls us again and again to duck under His wing, to find shelter and safety in His preached and Sacramental Word.

For in that preached Word, we hear that Jesus finished His course. He died and rose again for the salvation of the world!! That’s the heart and soul of the Biblical gospel. The head of the Serpent was crushed under the wounded heel of the woman’s seed. The devil couldn’t divert our Lord Jesus from His divine mission. That battle was lost forever.

Instead, Satan tries to divert us from receiving the news of Christ’s victory in our day to day lives of faith and obedience. The devil would have you distracted or indifferent to the things of God rather than for you to hear the Gospel and be forgiven. He would use anything to keep you from your course of following Jesus in daily repentance and faith: the shortcomings of the pastor, the local congregation and her members, or the failure and sins of the Church as a whole. He would use our busy lives to keep us from God’s life-giving Word. There are just too many things to get done with family, work, and community and not enough time. Too often, the things of God are the first to be neglected. And the devil is pleased!

Oh, how the devil delights when people reject or ignore God’s grace, forgiveness, love, and life-giving Spirit given through His Word and Sacraments!

But we are not ignorant of his ways, as St. Paul says in II Corinthians 2:11. Christ extends His arms of grace around us in our baptism, every time we hear that our sins

are forgiven, and when we receive His holy body and blood. Jesus promises each of us that He is with us “unto the end of the ages” (Matthew 28:20).

Our Lord Christ has covered you with His atoning death and resurrection life. That’s His course. He finished it. You can leave this place day in the peace and joy of Jesus under whose ever-abiding shadow you live. Know for certain, that no matter what occurs today, tomorrow, next week, next decade, next millennia, Jesus covers His people with His love and grace. Our eternal future, the resurrection of the just on the Last Day, is secure in Christ. May these words from today’s Epistle reading be to you a benediction and blessing as you leave today in God’s name and under His grace:

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved” (Phil. 3:20–4:1).

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.