

Lent 1 – February 28, 2010

Luke 13:31-35 **JESUS' JOURNEY OF LOVE TO JERUSALEM**

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Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Washington, D.C., is our nation's capital. It's been more than 14 years since my wife and I visited there, back when we made the trip to pick up our daughter from India. We spent a couple days visiting the capital building, going to the top of the Washington monument, touring the Air and Space Museum and other places like that. And we just scratched the surface. The city fairly drips with our national history and tradition. It's a journey every American should make at least once in their life.

Unfortunately, because Washington is the seat of our national government we also hear story after story about the corruption and the sleaze that go along with it. One scandal after another, involving politicians from both parties, always seems to be popping up. It's been that way for more than 200 years and I'm sure it will continue to be that way as long as there are politicians in office. The abuse of power, the openness to corruption and bribery, the disdain for those whose views aren't the same, the refusal to compromise for the good of the country and the thinking that government can do whatever it pleases – all those things have left people sick and tired of what goes on in that city. And so it also has a very much negative reputation, even though it is our nation's capital.

The capital of Israel in Jesus' day was Jerusalem. That city also had a reputation. The politicians and even the religious leaders who lived and worked there, were no different from our leaders in Washington. Time and again we see from the pages of the Bible the run-ins Jesus had with them. And as we make our way through another Lenten season we see how they collaborated in getting our Lord executed on the cross.

The words before us today show us Jesus' reactions and thoughts about these leaders and about the people of that great city. None of his words seem to be in a very positive spirit toward these people. And yet they show us the heart of our Savior, the deep feelings he had for them, feelings that reveal his attitudes about all people in general. Through the harsh words here, we see the lengths to which Jesus was willing to go in order to accomplish his mission. We see very clearly what motivated him, what drove him, as we follow:

JESUS' JOURNEY OF LOVE TO JERUSALEM

We will see that this journey of love takes Jesus to a sure and certain death, that it moves him to show deep sorrow and love over this city, many of whose people rejected him. And finally, this journey of love gives hope to those of us who do accept him.

I.

The setting for these words of Jesus is that it was just a couple of months before his suffering and death in Jerusalem. He had left Galilee, the main area for his ministry, and was gradually making his way to the capital city. At present he was in the region of Perea, just east of the Jordan River. This was King Herod's territory, the same Herod who was responsible for beheading John the Baptist. Herod apparently had some fears about Jesus, that he was becoming too popular, another prophet who might attack him because of his sleazy lifestyle, as John had done. So some Pharisees came to Jesus to warn him, **Leave this place and go somewhere else, Herod wants to kill you.** Because Herod was a cruel and ruthless ruler, there was the ring of truth to this warning.

But the main reason these Pharisees told Jesus to get moving wasn't because they were so concerned about Jesus' safety. Rather, they were after him as well. Jesus had made a lot of accusations against them, condemning them because of their hypocrisy, telling them point blank that they weren't part of God's kingdom, even though they were the religious leaders of that day. So they were looking for ways to get rid of Jesus. But they couldn't do it out in the countryside where Jesus freely mingled with the crowds who thronged to him. So Herod's threats were playing right into their hands. Jesus would have to go to Judea and Jerusalem, their territory, away from the crowds.

But in his reply to their warning about Herod, Jesus reveals that he is on a journey of love. He shows that he is on a mission and no one, not even wicked Herod, can deter him from that mission. He still had work to do. His love for the people, his desire to heal them from their physical and spiritual ailments, that took pre-

cedence, **I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal. I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem.** No one was going to push Jesus into doing something before he was ready. He was in total control of the situation. He had one goal in mind.

That's how we see his love so clearly on display here. We know what that goal was. This journey to Jerusalem was a death march. These Pharisees would get their wish. But it would happen according to Jesus' timetable. He was going to hand himself over when he was good and ready. He was not merely the victim of unfortunate circumstances, someone steamrolled by the politics of the day. This is what Jesus' mission was all about. This is what had been foretold about the Messiah for centuries, ever since God told Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden that an offspring of the woman would crush Satan's power, but would himself feel pain and torment. Jesus here shows his resolve to follow through on his Father's plan of salvation right down to the last painful detail.

That's why he had come into the world in the first place. God loved this sinful world so much that he sent his one and only Son to suffer and die. Going to Jerusalem meant sure and certain death for Jesus. Yet in his love for us, there was nothing that would turn him away from that. He would not be dissuaded from that goal. Accomplishing it meant saving the world. The threats of Herod, the schemes of the Pharisees, nothing could keep Jesus from making this journey of love to Jerusalem. That love is what motivated him, love for sinners like us, love for a world that would otherwise be headed on a certain journey to hell. Facing death in Jerusalem, that's what Jesus was willing to do for you and for me.

II.

And it is that city and its residents which next occupy Jesus' attention. We again see his boundless love as he sorrows over the holy city, **O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Your house is left to you desolate.** This was the city where people were planning his death. Yet Jesus laments over the fact that they would be lost forever. No curses, no defiant fist shaking, no sidestepping the journey, just the tears of a scorned lover.

Jerusalem and its people had so much going for it. The temple of the Lord was there. The sacrifices which pointed to the Lamb of God were carried out day after day on its altars. God's promises of love and protection all revolved around this city. Jesus had been there numerous times during his life and during his ministry. He had spent hours and hours teaching in the temple courtyards and throughout the city. Its citizens were among those who had thronged to hear him, to see him. They were part of his special people. His whole ministry was one of reaching out to them in love, revealing himself as their promised Messiah. He longed for them, wanted to gather them together under his protecting and saving care.

But they were not willing! Led by her self-righteous leaders, most of the people of Jesus' day, and especially those in and around Jerusalem, wanted nothing to do with him. Because the temple was there, they thought they were guaranteed God's love, no matter how they lived. It was their right as the chosen people of God, no matter what their attitude toward Jesus. So they just went through the motions in their worship. The leaders were more concerned about making money off the pilgrims who came there. In the past they had killed the prophets of God, the messengers who had come with words of warning, calling for heart-felt repentance and the fruits of faith. As we heard in our OT reading, they had seized Jeremiah because he had brought them the word of God. The same kinds of things happened to other prophets as well.

And now it was no different when the loving Savior himself appeared on the scene. They didn't believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah. He wasn't doing the things they expected, like driving out the Romans or patting them on the back for their great religiousness. He was calling on them to repent, to show mercy and love, to put their hearts into their worship. They liked it when he did the miracles, but they didn't believe that he was the Messiah. They just weren't willing to believe in him. They spurned his love.

So, Jesus says here, their city would be destroyed. And his words came true some 40 years later when the Romans leveled Jerusalem with its beautiful temple. Not one stone was left standing on top of another. God's justice, his sincere threat to punish unbelief, is just as forceful as his love.

But it's not that Jesus enjoys seeing people marching their way into hell. Quite the opposite. **God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth,** the Bible says. Our loving Savior wants everyone to believe that his death has meaning for them, washing their sins away, bringing restoration in the

relationship he wants to have with them. He wants everyone to enjoy the blessings of heaven. After all, Jesus didn't just come to die for a select few. This journey of love to Jerusalem was so that the whole world would be reconciled to God. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for your sins, and not only for yours, but also for the sins of the whole world. His boundless love reaches out to all mankind, no matter where you live, no matter what your age, gender or social standing. Jesus loves YOU!

Yet, not everyone will believe that gospel message of love. There will always be people, even some who come through the doors of this church, who will reject him. Maybe they won't come out and say it, and maybe they don't realize they are doing it. But by their laxity in worship, by the feeling that they can live together outside of marriage, or cheat in their businesses, or that they will have time later on, they just don't take God and his word, Jesus' love and salvation seriously. They resist his call to repentance and faith. They feel they can dictate to God how they live and how he should treat them. In essence they reject the notion that only in Christ is their salvation. For whatever reason, they just aren't willing to listen to him and to believe in him. And like Jerusalem of old, what will their fate be?

III.

The people of Jerusalem were missing out on their best chance. The next time they would see Jesus he will be coming in his glory to judge the world. Then they will have to grudgingly acknowledge him as the Son of God. For you and me, because we know why Jesus was making this journey of love to Jerusalem, because we know what he accomplished there, we see that love holding out hope to those who do accept him. Jesus is also talking here about those who would see him in the future, see him with the eyes of faith. Unbelief was blinding the Jews. They were rejecting the love of their Savior.

But by your presence here today you are saying that it's not that way for you. The Holy Spirit has used the gospel and the sacraments to open your spiritual eyes. You have put your faith and trust in Jesus, that his determined journey of love had a specific goal, a goal that was accomplished and which has meaning for you and me. His love has touched your heart. He has given you hope. You have placed your lives into his hands, counting on that love to guide you and protect you. You believe his promises to care for you here and now, and for your eternal future.

His love moved him to make this journey, to die on the cross so that your sins are forgiven. His love assures you that you are saved. You are counting on that love to resurrect your body from the grave so that you will share in the joys and blessings of heaven. Then you will be one of those who praises him with joy and gratitude, **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.** Jesus is holding out his hand to you, inviting you to hide beneath his wings, saved from the dangers of sin, death, Satan and hell. His boundless love is ready to lift you from the depths of despair and rejection into the mansion of heaven. That's what his love for you is all about.

He made the trip to his nation's capital, not to see the sights, but to put his boundless love on display for you and for me. He met with hostile opposition, but his journey there means that one day you and I will make a journey to another Jerusalem, the heavenly city where we shall live with our loving Savior forever. AMEN.