

February 28, 2010
Second Sunday in Lent

“Living Under His Wing”

Text: Luke 13:31-35

In 2005 Hurricane Katrina hit the Louisiana coast, levees collapsed and the city of New Orleans was devastated. Hundreds died and thousands of homes and businesses were destroyed. The rest of the country and even other countries rallied support and relief and came to the aid of the city and continue to do so to this day. While there is yet much to be done, the city has made a great recovery. After the storm some thought the city would never come back, that it would simply decline and die. It didn't.

But imagine how things would be if Mayor Ray Nagin, Governor Blanco, the legislature and the people of New Orleans had said to George Bush, the Red Cross and everybody else, “No thanks. Don't worry. We can handle this on our own. We don't need your help. We don't want your help.” Imagine if all the aid and volunteers came anyway but the people of the city blocked the roads, threw things and spat at the volunteers, refused to cash the checks, overall just abused the aid givers until everybody just turned back and went home. Where would the city be today? Probably dead.

This is the same type of foolishness Jesus laments in our Gospel lesson as He says, “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken.*”

Time after time after time the people of Israel had been called back to faith in Yahweh, yet they continually turned away from His mercies. The temple in Jesus' day had in many ways become a place of empty worship. Instead of a place where people came in humility with repentant and contrite hearts to worship God and beg His pardon for their sins, for many it was instead a place for empty sacrifices; something they did to pay for their sins themselves so they would be free to go out and sin some more. God's law had been hijacked by human works and turned into a thing of prideful self-righteousness rather than a way of living out love for God and neighbor as His chosen people.

God had always been about protecting His chosen people and making them thrive under His care. In their sin, they never opted to cooperate with that plan. And now Jesus says, “*Behold, your house is forsaken*” seemingly acknowledging that Israel has finally done it; God has finally given up on them as His people. And I guess in a way that's true because in about forty years Jerusalem would be destroyed and the Jewish people would be scattered.

Yet Jesus makes very clear that God has not given up on His people; the humanity that He created. In the face of a threat by an earthly king, Herod, Jesus makes clear that nothing will stop Him from accomplishing the mission for which He came. “*Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. Nevertheless, 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.*”

Nobody is going to kill Jesus before He gets to Jerusalem. You might even say nobody kills Jesus even in the city. Yes, Jesus is going up to Jerusalem and there He will be rejected by the Jews, God's “chosen” race, and be tortured and crucified to death. Yet this is all by God's plan, not by Jerusalem's. Jesus is very intentionally going to where Israel had in the past rejected and killed Yahweh's prophets and there He Himself, the prophet of all prophets, the Word made

flesh, is going to suffer at Jerusalem's hands and die for her sins and the sins of the whole world to make for God a new and holy people. Jesus does die, but it is always His intention and purpose to die for the humanity that God so dearly loves. Near the end of Luke's narrative Jesus chooses to give up His life crying, "*Father, into Your hands I commit my Spirit*" and breathing His last.

You and I today live in the aftermath of that wonderful death and the victorious resurrection to life eternal that took place three days later. We are here today praising God for it, receiving the wonderful gifts that spring from it and give the forgiveness won by Jesus on the cross. We remember Jesus words, "*How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken.*" and we figure that we don't have to worry about that. Obviously we are gathered under Jesus. We are here in His house, receiving Word and Sacrament and the eternal life that comes from it.

Well, we should every day but in Lent especially take some time to examine where it is we stand. It is a time to look and make sure we are indeed gathered under Christ as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing.

Jerusalem had the massive temple complex built by King Solomon and Levites for priests there and all the trappings of proper worship yet they rejected Yahweh's blessing, aid and protection. Their worship became empty and the people turned to false gods and Babylon conquered the nation and tore the temple down. Later Jerusalem rebuilt a lesser but still impressive temple which Jesus disciples' marveled at and it again had all the trappings of proper worship. But Jerusalem rejected God's Christ; God's salvation, protection and love and forty years later the temple was destroyed and was never rebuilt.

Although the truth of Jesus has been made plain to us we, like Jerusalem, can reject God's love, protection and salvation yet fool ourselves into thinking that we're doing OK because we make all the right moves, do the right rituals, write a decent check for the temple coffers, say the right words in public. Satan likes nothing better than to convince Christians that they are close to "the church" while they are far from Christ. The dark storm of sin comes in and devastates every single life on earth and the Devil has been pushing us to believe the same lie for a long time; that we can be like gods, that our salvation is up to us.

"I've got it handled. I do the church thing like a good Christian should. I tithe...well at least as much as I can spare. I volunteer some time, at least during Fall Fest. I listen to the sermon...feeling guilty, feeling guilty, feeling guilty....is he to the forgiveness part yet? Ding! There it is. Feel good now. I can go home and do my normal sins and come back next week. I've got it handled."

This is not the temple folks. Jesus Christ is the temple. If our trust is in the stuff we do in this place, we are like a devastated New Orleans saying, "No thanks! I've got it handled." If we are doing this on our own, we are like a baby chick telling mama hen that we don't need her, that we can take care of ourself and we're going to go off on our own to play with the foxes.

Worship and church is of course good and right, so long as it is done knowing that in it God is doing the work of giving us His great gifts of love and forgiveness, gifts made available to us through Jesus' willing sacrifice of Himself in Jerusalem.

What we do as Christians is to constantly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the one in charge of our lives and our salvation; that it is the Holy Spirit who calls and keeps us in faith. In every facet of our existence we want to be making sure we are living it to the glory of He who saved us. In everything we do we want to be striving to cuddle closer under the protective wing of our God.

Lent is a time to focus on Jesus suffering and death. One way to do that is to focus on how devastated and destroyed, how forsaken you would be if He hadn't done it. Realizing that, we do not reject Him. We realize that our God died for us and every day comes to us with His aid, protection, forgiveness and love. Glory in the truth that He is always here in our time of need. Receive Him and invite Him and enjoy His presence in every facet of this life and into the next.

And the peace that passes all understanding, be and abide with us all. Amen.