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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent/Year C  
March 17, 2019  
Text: Luke 13:31-35

“How often have I desired to embrace you!”

On this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent our lectionary jumps to the thirteenth chapter of Luke. By now we find that Jesus has traveled through Galilee, Samaria, Judea, and one town and village after the other casting out demons, healing the sick and teaching the crowds that often followed about the kingdom of God. He and his disciples have not only been followed by those seeking him for healing and restoration but also by those who kept a close watch. For Jesus and his disciples were not popular with religious leaders nor with those governing the people. Those in opposition did not fully understand who Jesus was and where he got his authority. He was like that gnat that just won't go away.

He was nearing the great City of Jerusalem when some Pharisees stopped him. We know that often in the gospels Jesus had run-ins with the Pharisees. Scholars are divided on whether not those in this group supported Jesus or if they simply did not want him causing a raucous in the city. Whatever their motive, they sought to warn Jesus that he should turn around because Herod Antipas wanted him dead!

That Herod wanted Jesus killed should come to no surprise. The Herodian family seemed to have a thing against Jesus from almost the moment he was born. You see, it was Herod the Great, the father of this Herod, who found out from mysterious travelers that the king foretold by the prophets had been born in the city of Bethlehem. Herod the Great was not about to be dethroned by an infant so he ordered that all males under the age of two slaughtered. Jesus and his parents fled to Egypt. And now his son, Herod Antipas, not only had Jesus' cousin, John the Baptizer, imprisoned for speaking the truth but had his head cut off as well. To be sure, Herod had been listening to reports about Jesus and plotted and schemed to get rid of this miracle worker and enemy of Rome. Herod was bidding his time.

Jesus could have been tempted just he had been tempted in the desert to run away to save himself from John's fate. But Jesus had no intention of turning back. Jesus knew Israel's history as prophet after prophet made the same journey only to meet their end in Jerusalem-Zechariah, Uriah, Isaiah, and more. Prophets were often stoned and killed not because they gave bad sermons but because they dared challenge the authorities that were. What prophets dared to speak threatened existing structures and positions of power. Prophets dared to tell them about God's power and God's truth and God's plan for God's people. Jesus was no different. He knew that he was to be about doing God's work and that to go to Jerusalem would mean certain death but it would not be at the hands of Herod. He was not about to be derailed by the manipulative, plotting, and conniving puppet of Rome. His eyes were fixed on Jerusalem. 'Go tell that old fox, Herod!' he says to the Pharisees, 'Go tell that old fox that I am busy about God's business.'

And as he looked over and beheld Jerusalem Luke says that Jesus began to fill with emotion and grieve. "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem*"..., Jesus said, "*how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you were not willing!*"

He lamented not for himself but for the Holy City of Jerusalem and the people he and God love. He lamented over the relationship that God had longed for with humankind since the days in the Garden of Eden, and of the ark, and at the foot of Mount Sinai and of years of God's children wandering in the desert. God had promised God's unconditional love. God would be their one true God and they were to be God's people. Yet over and over and over again humankind turned its back on the covenant established and over and over and over again God would long and seek and search and invite and love in spite of them.

As we continue our journey through Lent we are reminded that God is still longing. God is still seeking. God is still searching and inviting and loving in spite of us. God still desires to gather us as a hen gathers her chicks, as a loving parent embraces their child.

We are sometimes a fickle lot. We are scattered and torn and broken. We are otherwise occupied with other "things" of the world. We are people who sometime look everywhere but up. Yet God still treasures the creatures God has created. We are reminded that our God is a God of promise who

does not give up in drawing us into a deep and abiding relationship with Him.

What is it keeps us from gathering under God's wings? Are we that all together? That secure? No, because terrorism continues to strike its ugly head like it did this past Friday in the mosques in New Zealand. And people and systems continue to hurt the innocents in every town, city, and corner of the globe. The Herods of the world keep on plotting and scheming. The tempter continues to whisper words of fear and discouragement and hate.

The Good News is that God loved us enough to send his only Son that we might have redemption of our sins and fullness of life in Him. *Fullness of life*. Not partial life. Not half-life but fullness of life. Jesus knew that Herod's reign and those that would follow would in no way outlast God's reign. No earthly power will outlast the everlasting, never ending, omnipotent power of God.

Jesus did not turn back from his fate. His eyes were firmly fixed on Jerusalem. On the hard wood of the cross, Jesus was like a mother hen who offers her very life so that her chicks will be safe from harm. He willingly offered himself and spread his arms wide so that we may come into God's unending embrace.

We have a Savior who bids us not to flee from the likes of Herod or from the curves that life may throw at us or from the midst of struggles and challenges, or in times of change. For our strength comes from where? Where? The Lord our God! Psalm 27, verses 1-4 say (let's say it together):

*1 The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom then shall I fear? \*  
the LORD is the strength of my life;  
of whom then shall I be afraid?*

*2 When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh, \*  
it was they, my foes and my adversaries, who  
stumbled and fell.*

*3 Though an army should encamp against me, \*  
yet my heart shall not be afraid;*

*4 And though war should rise up against me, \*  
yet will I put my trust in him.*

Saints, with that assurance we can press forward with hope. For we have a Savior in whom we put our trust. We have a Savior who bids us to continue to press on, to push on, to keep on keeping on, and to imitate him in our relationships with others. We are called to be like him and like that mother hen so that we may gather, support, and protect the most vulnerable of our society from the foxes who prey on them and us in our day. We can do all things that are right and good by keeping our eyes fixed on him.

The late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said: “Never, never be afraid to do what’s right, especially if the well-being of a person or animal is at stake. Society’s punishments are small compared to the wounds we inflict on our soul when we look the other way.” Mercy! Lord, keep us near the cross!

Jesus cried for the great city of Jerusalem and for its inhabitants that day. “*Jerusalem, Jerusalem*” ..., he said, “*how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you were not willing!*”

May we also hear him calling to us. May we heed his voice.

And so we pray: Gracious God, break down those things and still those voices that separate and keep us from you. Keep us in your loving care and in your mercy so that we come to rest always in your saving embrace. Amen.