

## **Sermon, Father William J. Albinger**

**Sunday February 28, 2010**

Lent 2C 2010

*(Sermon delivered from notes – this is a recreation):*

In the name of our one, ever creating, ever loving, ever sustaining God:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Gospel lesson today reminds us that Lent, like life, is a journey. Today's lesson from Luke places Jesus in the middle of his journey to Jerusalem. This is no casual visit to the city. Earlier, Luke notes that Jesus' face was set upon Jerusalem. Now going along the way, Jesus encounters some Pharisees who warn him to flee from this place because Herod wants to kill him. How does Jesus react?

First he dismisses Herod's importance. He tells the Pharisees to go back to that old fox and tell him "I have my own plans and he's not part of them – for the next two days I'm busy tossing out demons from people and curing them. On the third day I'll be finished with my work and be on my way to Jerusalem." Herod represents the powers that be in the world and Jesus isn't impressed. Most bibles translate the Greek word as "fox". To our ears that conjures up someone who behaves like a fox – someone who is sly, cunning and deceitful. That characterization could apply to many leaders today.

However the Greek word could also be translated as "jackal" – a worthless animal of no account – an animal so useless it is a scavenger living off the bones left by others. That, too, might be an apt description of some of our leaders.

But Jesus isn't concerned with them. No, the real problem lies in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the city that God gave to God's people. Jerusalem is the place where God's house on earth was built in the midst of the temple. Jesus makes clear that he will die in Jerusalem – "a city who kills prophets and stones those sent to it!" Jesus is here echoing other prophets who were

shunned by Jerusalem – Jeremiah who looked at the city square and noticed the cadences of its death march; Isaiah who challenged the common theology that the Davidic monarchy and God’s presence in the Temple was the culmination of God’s plans for God’s people and that God’s will was thus represented by the political will of the state.

Both Jeremiah and Isaiah could imagine and visualize a better, more just and more embracing world. That made them dangerous to those served by the status quo such as Ezra and Nehemiah. Both views are found in the Bible, but Jesus quotes Isaiah and Jeremiah frequently.

Jesus then laments over Jerusalem as the Prophets have in the past. The lament is tender and heartfelt: “ How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

Jesus is not going to be rushed. He knows exactly what was to happen, when it was to happen and where it would happen. Jesus is firmly in control and willing. Jesus is not victimized. He is going to Jerusalem as a mother hen to protect her chicks and he laments because he knows that they will scatter rather than seek his protection.

Jesus sees Jerusalem as a prophet would see it. Most of us, I think would see the magnificent temple atop Mount Zion, the two great palaces and the impressive public buildings. Most would see the shining city upon the hill, but Jesus sees the spiritual emptiness within the magnificent temple with its rituals and wealth. Jesus sees a new way of gathering and protecting God’s people, but people can only see the old way.

Jesus in this lesson shows God as vulnerable. In our lesson from Genesis, God promised Abraham land and an heir - the two things needed to fulfill God’s promise. When he asks God how he will know that this will be, God enters into a covenant with him. God’s covenant is unilateral – God gets no reciprocal promise. The image of God walking between the halved parts of the animals is a reference to the ways ancient treaties or covenants were entered. Here Jesus shows God’s willingness to suffer to keep the covenant, to protect God’s people.

Our Gospel lesson concludes with a judgment tempered by some hope. “See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” Your house is left empty and desolate to you. It is no longer God’s house but now only yours. That is the judgment. The promise is that it can be reversed by faith in the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

So what about us? Lent is the time to do some serious self-examination and to ask some hard questions. Herod was quite certain of his authority and legitimacy. The people of Jerusalem were quite certain that they were following the ways of the Lord according to Scripture as they understood it. They thought they were protecting God and all that is good when they stoned the prophets and crucified Jesus.

Are we the ones willing to be protected under Jesus’ wings or are we ones that prefer to be scattered rather than rely on a vulnerable God? Are we so certain that we will protect God by coercing others or doing violence to others? The question boils down to whose are we? In whom do we place our trust?

This is a difficult question. Two thousand years ago, Jesus showed a different way to be. He spent his last days casting out demons and healing people. He reached out to those in need and responded to them. That was his mission – to heal and show people a better way. Are we that kind of people? Are we that kind of church? When people see us, will they say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord?

Amen.