**Luke 13:31-35 March 13, 2022**

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

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 13 here re-reading these words. “At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.’ And he said to them, ‘Go and tell that fox, Behold I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow and the third day I finish my course.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Imagine if someone came up to you and said, “You need to leave the United States of America, the President wants to kill you.” Suddenly we can see the context of this morning’s Gospel lesson where the Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod wants him dead. This morning you are going to hear about Religion and Politics. The Pharisees and Herod. Politics is always a troublesome topic but watch out whenever Religion and Politics get together. In the book of Revelation, it’s the recipe for trouble and persecution. When there are problems between religion and politics it usually results in death, and this scene is no different.

The Pharisees came to Jesus, seeming to be on His side. Herod has a warrant out for His arrest. “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you. There’s a death threat on your head. You don’t want to get yourself killed, do you? Get out while you can.” Of course, the Pharisees were scheming to do the same thing. They’d been plotting it for over a year. They just couldn’t agree on when and how to do it. It makes the whole thing quite ironic. They are telling him that someone wants to kill him, when in reality they are the ones who want to kill him too. It just goes to show that in their minds they follow the well known saying, “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.”

But Jesus seems completely unconcerned by the whole thing. “Go tell that old fox I’ve still got work to do – today, tomorrow, and the next day. There are demons to cast out, sick people to heal. And on the third day I will reach my goal.” On the third day. This is not some insignificant phrase. All the important stuff in the Bible happens “on the third day. After all, we are looking forward to a third day that is to come, when the death he suffers will be destroyed. Jesus knew what was in store for Him in Jerusalem. He’d already predicted it, that He would suffer, die and on the third day rise. While death threats for us in our lives from Presidents, Governors, or really any person in authority would rattle us and scare us, Death threats from kings are of no concern to Jesus. His authority is greater, he doesn’t fear death or threats when he himself is the King of Kings and highest authority.

He is the Lord. He lays down His life on His own terms. When the crowd wants to throw Him off a cliff, He walks through them and leaves without a scratch. He is in charge. Last week you heard how He battled the devil in the wilderness with nothing but the Word of God. He fears nothing of Herod or of any king. Again, when we talk of Jesus Christ serving in the office of King he is not A King or one of the kings he is the King of Kings. When He stood before Pilate at His trial, He offered no defense. He reminded Pilate that Pilate’s authority came from above and that Jesus’ kingdom was not of this world. Threats from Herod mean nothing to him.

Jesus knows what’s on the minds of the Pharisees as well. He knows they’re plotting to kill Him too, and all this talk of concern for His safety is just a ruse. “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.” This is a stinging criticism but also a statement of fact. If a prophet is going to die, it has to be in Jerusalem. That’s where prophets go to die.

Jerusalem had a reputation when it came to prophets. Just ask Jeremiah, whose prophetic career didn’t exactly flourish in Jerusalem. He was arrested, thrown into a pit, his books burned. Isaiah was killed in Jerusalem in gruesome fashion. The NT didn’t fare any better. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned to death in Jerusalem by no less than the religious elite. James, the brother of John the fisherman, was killed by Herod in Jerusalem. Jerusalem had a reputation for killing the prophets. Jeremiah knew that, but didn’t seem to care. We see his bravery in our Old Testament lesson. “Do whatever you want with me, but rest assured, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it.”

Jerusalem was steeped in “innocent blood.” Soon, in our Passion readings on Tuesday and Wednesday nights, we will come to the section of Scripture where we find Pontius Pilate washing his hands of Jesus’ blood in Jerusalem and declaring, “I am innocent of this man’s blood” We’ll find it is the people of Jerusalem who cry, “Let His blood be on us and our children.” It was in the temple in Jerusalem that Judas tried to give back the money he was paid to betray Jesus because he had betrayed “innocent blood.” And the priests refused to take it back because it was “blood money” so they bought a “Field of Blood” with it. Jerusalem had a bloody history, the temple was there, sacrifices were made for the sins of the people and the final sacrifice would be there: Jesus, God’s Lamb, the final and ultimate Blood, the One that atones for the sin of the world.

Politics and Religion hated Jesus. They eventually got Him crucified. Religion charged Him with blasphemy. He dared to say He was the Son of God. Politics charged Him with treason. He said He was a king.

The world of political power has no use for a king who rides in humility, who dies for His people, including His enemies. A king without a palace, without royal robes, without a crown except one made of thorns. The powerful rulers of Jesus’ day were Pontius Pilate and King Herod. Those two died in disgrace and disappeared from history. Jesus died and rose from the dead and not only made history but redeemed it. Politics cannot save; only Jesus can. “Trust not in princes, in mortal men who cannot save.”

The religious authority of that time has no use for Jesus either. Jesus is really the end of that religious structure and their authority and they know it. Jesus destroyed the traditions of men. He claimed God as His Father. He interpreted the Law without the need to consult the experts. He unleashed a Law where the standard was perfection. Be perfect. Be holy. Keep every Law down to the tiniest letter. In your thoughts, your words, your actions. Don’t bargain with God. Do the commandments and you will live. Trying hard is not righteousness. Self-improvement won’t cut it. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees you’re out. You won’t see the kingdom of God. Nor will they, they took that personally. The Pharisees understood what Jesus would do to their way of life.

Even more so, Jesus revealed an unconditional love and mercy of God to sinners. He taught that mercy not merit was where the action is, and the way to avoid God’s judgment and to stand justified before God was not to improve yourself but to die to yourself and trust Jesus to do the heavy lifting of your salvation.

It drives our Lord to tears. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem. Killing prophets and stoning those sent to you. How often I have longed to gather your children together as a mother hen gathers her brood of chicks under her wings, but you would not.” He mourns over His city. He mourns over what politics and religion have done to the city that was at one time God’s city. He mourns over their unbelief, their reliance on worldly power, their rejection of the Word and the prophets who spoke it.

Every time Jerusalem killed a prophet, every time Jerusalem shut her ears to the Word, it was Christ Himself they rejected. “How often I have longed to gather you.” But they would not trust. They would not believe. They would not abandon their false gods of power and even themselves. They would not live by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God They would not receive the One who had come to save them.

It breaks Jesus’ own heart. This is His city, His temple, His throne. Yet He is unrecognized, unwanted, hated. “He came to His own, yet His own did not receive Him.” We’re reminded here that salvation is given by grace, a gift unearned, it’s always the mercy of God. The Son of God has to go this way alone. For us. For all. For you. He spreads His wings over the city that wants Him dead, over a world that considers Him a stranger, an alien, a nuisance, an imposter, a fraud. He spreads those arms wide to embrace every sinner and every sin in the only death that saves.

And so their house once filled with the glory of God sadly is destroyed. It’s a warning to each of us. Don’t take the mercies of God for granted. Don’t assume we have tomorrow and the next day. Now is the time. Now is the day of your salvation. Now is the moment of repentance. Those tears Jesus shed lamenting over the holy city, He sheds over His church too, His church all throughout the world, and yes even here in Onekama. He sheds tears for whenever we reject the Word in favor of coziness with the world of politics and religion. The Spirit of Christ seeks to call, gather, enlighten, sanctify, and keep us in the one true faith.

Jerusalem had a future. But Jerusalem today is a hollow shell, a relic of the past. The next time the holy city appears in the Bible, it comes down from above, from heaven, as a beautiful bride dressed for her wedding day, radiant, spotless, glorious, processing down from heaven. We sing of Jerusalem the golden and Jerusalem our happy home, both references not to the actual city on Earth but the heavenly glory that is to come. These images are of a Jerusalem redeemed, restored, raised up. Her murders have been atoned for in the death of God’s Son. The blood shed in her streets has been washed by the blood of the Lamb, who died at her gates, this Lamb of God who was killed is now the Lamb enthroned, the light and life of Jerusalem.

That’s your city! You are free citizens of that city made holy by the blood of the Lamb. Your citizenship is in heaven, as Paul said. Your baptism is your citizenship papers. You are citizens of heavenly Jerusalem, God’s free city – redeemed in the death of Jesus, raised in His resurrection, glorified in Him and soon to be seen in glory when He appears in glory on the Last Day. Then you too will say, “Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!” And there will be no lament, for you will be gathered into the wings of Christ and in safety and joy with him forever.  
Amen

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.