

Year C-Lent2-2019-When Will We See Jesus Again

March 17th, 2019

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Luke 13:31-35

When Will We See Jesus Again?

As we join the scene, Jesus has been going through one town and village after another on his way to Jerusalem. Crowds have gathered and he has taught them through parables. A woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years appeared and Jesus set her free. When he did this, the leader of the synagogue became indignant because she had been healed on the Sabbath. Jesus' reply put Jesus' opponents to shame while the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing. Not wanting the crowd to think they have won at the expense of their Rabbi, he tells them a story about the narrow gate where many will try to enter and will not be able. "Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

"At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.'" I think they were sincere. Jesus replies, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.'" Jesus calls Herod a fox and then recites all that Jesus has been doing to prepare for that third day when Jesus' work is finished. We who view this story from the other side of Easter know that on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead. The Day of Resurrection finishes Jesus' work and seals the finger-pointing satanic mechanism's fate. Threatening to destroy can't work when people know the power of the resurrection for then we know God is more powerful than death. In fact, death is nothing to God who created the universe.

Jesus goes on, "Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside Jerusalem." Herod does not dictate Jesus' actions and Jesus will not alter his plan to accommodate Herod. He will continue toward Jerusalem for Jerusalem is the sacrificial city, where the Temple functions to sacrifice animals in lieu of humans day after day and where the prophets died at the peoples own hand. Soon Jesus will be among them.

Jesus laments, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! See, your house is left to you." You have gotten what you wanted—a world governed by fear, disunity violence and death. I wanted to gather you so that you would be safe but you were not willing. I wanted to save you from your alienating, divisive and violent ways, but you wouldn't allow it. You were not open to a new way of gathering.

The old way of gathering is the sacrificial way. It attempts to create social cohesion by expelling those the majority decides are bad or lesser. The mechanism is the pointing finger, a mechanism the New Testament calls "the Satan." As we know, the pointing finger has destroyed millions of innocent people in every generation. It's happening all around us and in our midst. It's happening now.

Jesus, God's Son, breaks the power of this old way by becoming the excluded One. Now, if we follow Jesus we gather around those who are excluded because that is where Jesus is. He occupies the place of the excluded with his own body, as the image of the hen implies. It is his way of showing us what we do and where he is. He is with the excluded. He is our victim. Any time we exclude the least of these, we exclude him. And remember, when we humans were in the very process of excluding and killing him, he forgave us.

James Alison says he is the "forgiving victim." His forgiveness opens a new way; he is the new glue for community centered in inclusion, forgiveness and mercy. Now we gather to confess our sin, receive his grace and go out to live forgiveness while serving those who are being excluded. Now our finger points to Jesus and no other.

The image of the non-violent hen who desires to gather her brood is perfect. She gathers to comfort and protect her brood by hiding them from the violence of the fox. The fox looks for her to scatter and consume. She sacrifices herself to the fox so that the scattered chicks can gather, escape and survive. While the hen gathers her brood, Jerusalem expels some to gather others. Expelling to gather doesn't work, isn't human and leaves a residue of hate and desire for revenge that lasts for centuries.

Lent is a time of moving toward that third day completion. It won't happen in Galilee. It will happen in Jerusalem, the city of sacrifice. The time and the place have already been established. Jesus chooses to die so as to get through to us. It's an act of love for us all. In this sense, he does sacrifice himself but it's not to God or to God's need for justice. It is to us and to our violence. It's his revelation of God's love and a showing of the way out of our caught-ness in violence and revenge. Not only is it a showing but it actually makes our escape possible. It won't be easy but we won't be alone with it.

Jesus' last line in today's reading is "I tell you, you won't see me until the time comes when you say, *Blessings on the one who comes in the Lord's name.*" This was a new insight for me. Remember a few minutes ago when Jesus said "See, your house is left to you" and I added "you get the house you want"? Yes, we get the house we want; a house built on violence and exclusion or a house built on love, mercy and forgiveness. Another translation puts it as "Look your house is abandoned." The inner framework of violence holding the house together has

been revealed to the world and will increasingly no longer work. The house is falling apart. It is the gospel that has revealed its false foundations.

The house of human culture based on “us” vs “them” is imploding from within and becoming uninhabitable. We see it everywhere: on every continent, in every political debate, in many of our families, in our churches no matter which denomination, and even in nature where the earth itself seems to be coming apart. When our house becomes so uninhabitable that we are drawn to our knees in desperation and confession, we are ready to say “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our Lord,” then we will see Jesus again. Or to put it another way, we will see Jesus when we get so tired of scattering and hiding, of contention and strife, of self-promotion and self-hatred that we finally say “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Then we will turn, see him and find peace.

When will we see Jesus again? When we confess our need of him! Amen.