

LENTEN STUDY 4 2013 LAMENT OVER JERUSALEM

'Some Pharisees said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox 'I am casting out demons.. today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.. today, tomorrow and the next day I must be on my way because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem... how often have I desired to gather your children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing. See, your house is left to you desolate.'" (Luke 13:31-35)

What is going on? Have the Pharisees had a change of heart? Do they really care that maniacal Herod wants to kill Jesus and seek to protect him? There were moderate God-fearing Pharisees such as Gamaliel, the advocate for the early Christian sect (Acts 5.33-39) and Pharisees of the ilk of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. There were eccentric 'Bruised' or 'Bleeding' Pharisees who were so 'pure' they would not look upon a woman in the street, so shut their eyes, and met with collision consequences. There were the hypocritical 'Hump-Backed' Pharisees, who walked bent double in false, cringing humility like Uriah Heep. The Pharisees whom Jesus met were *the really bad eggs*. They hated the puppet King Herod Antipas of Galilee, the manikin who danced to mighty Rome's tune. But they allied with him and got him riled up in seeing Jesus as a threat to their power and status as one who must be eliminated. Their love of the status quo and their exalted position blinded them, so they actually sold out to evil, and so ended up fighting God. Jesus attacked these, "Woe to you Pharisees. You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside, you are full of greed and wickedness." (Luke 11: 39-40)

At their 'warning,' Jesus answered, "Go and tell that fox for me, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the *third* day I finish my work." (Luke 13: 32) To the Hebrew, a fox was the craftiest, most cunning and unprincipled of animals, who was also most maliciously destructive. Herod had killed John Baptist. Jesus was quoting Hosea (6:2) "After two days the Lord will revive us; on the *third* day he will raise us up that we may live before him." With certain death staring him in the face, Jesus was saying, "Go and tell that old fox I will finish the work for which I was sent. I will not be distracted, not step away from my plans earlier to go to Jerusalem to die. Death 'though mighty, will not have the last word. For love is stronger than death. Life will triumph."

Jesus lived by God's timing and would not be deflected from the cross and resurrection. The place must be Jerusalem "because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem." (v.33) Instead of going away, Jesus will continue doing what he was sent to do for two more days, then allow Jerusalem, the very heart of God's people, to kill him on its terms.

What was the Pharisees' game? It was exactly that of the desert temptations.

"Get away from here. You don't have to go through with the passion and death. You can choose your own way, an easier way, one without pain and suffering. These people are not worth it." "You can have our whole world if you bow down and worship the world as we do. These people are not worth dying for."

Their vaunted power of self, of evil, did not have Jesus' welfare at heart. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to chuck in his mission and fail.

"Get away from here. Don't go to Jerusalem. Don't do what your God has planned for you to do. These people are not worth dying for." (Was it true? On Calvary, the sole success story to comfort the dying Jesus was the thief, who stole Paradise at the eleventh hour.)

The Pharisees' temptation was the same as Peter's warning, "God forbid it, Lord! This must not happen to you." (Matt. 16:22) They, like Peter, did not realize Jesus *has* to go to Jerusalem. The Pharisees were those referred to by Paul as

"the enemies of the cross of Christ...their end is destruction; their god is the belly; their minds are set on earthly things. But our commonwealth is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory." (Philippians 3: 18-21)

This came about because Jesus chose to die to be resurrected. His choice meant he was in control. The Pharisees wanted to go on controlling their world forever as they were doing with the protection of the puppet king they hated.

This is where ***the third day*** comes in.

"God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us ALIVE together with Christ, by grace you have been saved." (Ephesians 2: 4-5) "You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient." (Ephesians 2:1-3) But the cross of Jesus changed all this for us, despite the peoples' temptations to "Come down. Save yourself. These few people are not worth the pain and trouble." But in Jesus' eyes, we were worth it.

The third day is ***Easter Day***, the new life over death day.

"God raised US up with him and seated US with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that, in the ages to come, he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2: 6-7)

Just to make sure we get it, Paul adds "for by grace, you have been saved by faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2: 8-9)

Without this free gift of God, we would still be living our lives as if we were the only ones who mattered. So that is where forgiveness comes in again and again to rebuild and restore our dignity. As a boy, Jesus had been found in the Temple on the third day (Luke 2:46) and will be raised in three days (Luke 24:21).

The **Lament over Jerusalem**: (also Matt.23: 37-39) This was a sad, tender apostrophe over the Holy City. There is nothing which hurts so much as to offer love to someone and to have that offer spurned and rejected. It is life's bitterest tragedy to give one's heart to someone only to have it broken. This happened to Jesus in Jerusalem, as it had happened to many of

God's messengers, and still he came back to the people only to be rejected again as aged Simeon had foretold.

In a farmyard fire, a mother hen will give her life to save her chicks. After a fire, a dead hen, blackened and scorched, will be found to have live chicks sheltering under her wings. This was the image Jesus chose. Alas, Jesus foresaw Jewish chicks, who would not turn from the way of revolutionary violence, scurrying off in every direction taking no notice of the impending Roman smoke and flames that would crush them completely in the year 70 CE. Are we still like that brood of chicks, unwilling to have this mothering God spread his wings over us against the threat of death? As a mothering God, he opens his wings/arms on the cross as a place of refuge, longing to gather us in in tender compassion, fiercely to protect us from death, but he cannot make us walk into them (as the 'Good' thief did).

Why does a city/community murder its prophets? These are awkward people who ask awkward questions, who do not fit into the system; they are anomalies who make us think and examine our priorities; they are not complacent about the status quo and are breakers of outworn idols. The orthodox resent disturbance, any suggestion that there could be new ways to look at set traditions. Prophets are not organized, not managers, but starry-eyed idealists. The Church must learn to bear with its prophets. Jesus was a prophet in contending with the worship of the day; it had become all frills and formalism, an idol in need of breaking down. Since it produced few fruits of repentance, Jewish religion had taken a path that would lead to inevitable Roman ruin. "See, your house (Temple) is left to you desolate." (Matt. 23:38). It had become an empty shell without life or heart.

There is a *Peanuts* cartoon: Lucy begins "What are you doing in that tree?"

Linus answers, "We're looking for something. Can you see Snoopy. We climbed up together. Now, I don't see him."

Lucy unsympathetically, "Beagles can't climb trees."

Snoopy falls "KLUNK" on his head.

Lucy bellows, "You stupid Beagle! What are you doing climbing about in a tree?"

Linus answered, "Don't yell at him. We were looking for a nest."

Lucy walks off, "You're both crazy! Go ahead and knock yourself out. I couldn't care less."

Snoopy, with head still spinning, "*Rats! I was hoping for a hug.*"

When we are hurt physically, emotionally, and someone lectures us about how stupid we are, "Rats!" we may say, "I was hoping for a hug." We need to know that somebody still cares and loves us, because we already know we were stupid. Are we too quick to give lectures as good and righteous Pharisaic believers who judge and condemn others for their mistakes. "You should have known better. You're getting what you deserve (blindness? HIV/AIDS? Unwanted pregnancy? addiction?) when people were thinking "Rats! I was hoping for a hug." Jesus' image of the hen gathering a whole clutch of chicks has the chicks packed closely together, learning to get along with one another if they wish to stay protectively packed together. How do we feel in the Sunday pew at the Sign of Peace shaking hands, even a kiss, or is it "Don't touch me!"

Lent has a lot less to do with what I think about myself and a whole lot more to do with what God thinks about me. Lent is about putting myself into God's story rather than trying to force God into ours. Lent is a time for looking at who I am in the light of who God is, shallow and self-centred, and, knowing that we are forgiven always, taking steps to do better.

The Revd Walter McEntee