

March 13th, 2022

Luke 13:31-35 “Want to Get Stoned in Jerusalem?”

Last week we had the Boy Scouts here in worship and I talked about how our Lenten journey has to start in the wilderness because the wilderness is where we discover who we are and whose we are. In the summer of 1983, I had a wilderness experience, and I made a decision to follow Jesus. This wilderness experience happened at Clydehurst Christian Ranch during a summer camp called “Big Sky ’83.” The camp was 50 miles south of Big Timber, Montana at the headwaters of the Boulder River. Now when we’re talking about Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness we’re referring to arid desert wilderness. We’re talking about places like Death Valley or the Mojave Desert. But my wilderness experience started in some of the most beautiful, pristine backwoods areas in the Central Rockies which may not be a fair comparison to what Jesus experienced as he prepared for his ministry. But this is where I met Jesus and this is where I decided to follow him.

One of the things that comes with following Jesus is learning songs about our faith. “Oh, you mean like the song we opened the service with - ‘*Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!*?’” No. I’m talking about *The Hippo Song* or *Rise and Shine*, also known as the Arky-arky song. You know, Church Camp songs. Youth Group songs. Some might even call them silly songs. Others who did not come to faith at summer camp may call them *irreverent* songs. I think they’re fun. But even I have to admit that I run into church camp songs that are just grossly insensitive and theologically abhorrent. The worst song on my list of horrible church camp songs is *I Don’t Want to Be a Goat*. Here’s how the song goes, and no ... I’m not going to dignify this awful song by singing it. It’s based on Matthew 25:31-46.

I don’t want to be a goat, nope
I don’t want to be a goat, nope
‘Cause a goat ain’t got no hope, nope

I don't want to be a goat, nope.

Now, before you say, "Well of course Jesse's not going to like this song because it's a hideously unfair representation of goats and perhaps leads people to believe God doesn't like goats." That's partly true. I do love my goats, but metaphorically speaking, it does fit into Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats which, by the way, has *nothing* to do with God hating goats. God loves goats. God loves all creatures great and small. No, what bothers me most about this song is verse two.

I don't wanna be a Pharisee
I don't wanna be a Pharisee
'Cause a Pharisee ain't fair you see
I don't want to be a Pharisee

You might say, "What's wrong with that verse? Doesn't the Bible make it clear that Jesus was at odds with the Pharisees? Isn't it obvious that he didn't *like* the Pharisees?" Not at all. See, we often think that the Bible portrays the Pharisees as the "bad guys" of the New Testament. Did Jesus have some harsh things to say to *some* Pharisees? Yes. To be fair, he had a *lot* of harsh things to say about a lot of Pharisees, but there was no blanket condemnation of *all* Pharisees. Just the corrupt ones who identified more with the Kingdoms of the Earth than they did with the Kingdom of God. When you read through Luke's gospel, you see plenty of occasions where Jesus shared meals with Pharisees. In the gospel of John we read about a Pharisee named Nicodemus who befriended Jesus. Over in the Book of Acts a Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up for the apostles and told the supreme council of the Jewish Sanhedrin to leave them alone to do their work and ministry. We've always got to be careful about lumping any religious tradition into a monolithic group.

But we do this all the time. Are all Muslims terrorists? No! Are all Buddhists pacifists? No. How many of us cringe when people assume that all Christians are "gay-hating" Fred Phelps Westboro Baptist types? Do some Christians fit that category? Yes. Just turn on the news. The

news loves to point the cameras at churches that picket people's funerals or who preach hateful messages. But we Christians are not all alike. It is so tempting for us to see other faith traditions as monolithic entities. But that's what we do, and we have been taught to do this with the Pharisees and then we write slanderous songs about them ... *and* goats!

Jesus did not hate all Pharisees and all Pharisees did not hate Jesus. Case in point - Our passage today begins with a group of Pharisees who approached Jesus to warn him about going to Jerusalem because King Herod had plans to kill him. By this time in the story of Jesus, it was clear that his ministry, which began in his hometown region of Galilee, was going to end in Jerusalem and that it was not going to end well. Jesus was preaching about how the Kingdom of God would overturn the Kingdoms of the Earth. He was saying that the kingdoms of the earth with all their focus on power and prestige would be brought to an end and that the Kingdom of God would come in like a pinch of yeast in a lump of dough and slowly turn everything upside down. Who isn't going to like this message? People who are in places of power and influence like Herod and Pilate and Caesar. They saw Jesus as a threat, so it wasn't at all surprising that they conspired to kill him. So hooray for those Pharisees who were looking out for Jesus by telling him to avoid Jerusalem. The problem is that Jesus *had* to go to Jerusalem. It's one of the things that his time in the wilderness helped him prepare for. Remember, the wilderness teaches us who we are and whose we are.

Jerusalem was the heart and center of the Israel's faith and commerce. It was King David who chose Jerusalem as Israel's capital. David's son King Solomon built the original temple there because God's people had settled down and no longer needed a traveling tabernacle. Over the years it had been sacked by Egyptians and Assyrians, and finally by the Babylonians who destroyed Jerusalem's royal palace and the temple before deporting the Israelites to Babylon. But then, the Persian king Darius the Great re-built the temple when he returned the exiled Israelites to their homeland. Then, under Roman occupation, Herod the Great expanded and re-modeled the temple 20 years before Jesus was

born. Jerusalem had quite a history, but it wasn't always kind to its prophets as Jesus said in this passage. It was a place where God's prophets were often stoned to death because they dared to speak truth to corrupt power. Jerusalem was Jesus' destiny. He knew that his message would be met with resistance. People from his own hometown synagogue wanted to kill him because he read a passage from Isaiah about one who would be anointed to proclaim good news to the poor. What sent them over the edge was when Jesus said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." So if Jesus was almost killed by his own people in his own hometown, how in the world was he going to make it out of Jerusalem alive? Well ... he wasn't. He wouldn't.

This group of Pharisees in this morning's scripture didn't think Jesus should risk going to Jerusalem. His disciples didn't think it was worth the risk either. Four chapters before our text today, Jesus' right-hand man Peter strongly objected to his plans to go to Jerusalem. But Jesus told Peter to get out of his way and let him go. He said, "The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

On Friday, I had lunch with a friend who asked me what Lenten season meant to me. I told him Lent is the pathway from the wilderness to the cross. We start our Lenten journey with Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, then we follow him when he announces his plans to go to Jerusalem, even though we know what his fate will be once he reaches his destination. Then we have to ask the question, "Would I be willing to go somewhere knowing that I might face severe opposition and maybe even death?" Jesus chose his path out of compassion. Jesus said how often he wanted to gather Jerusalem's children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. A hen gathers her brood when there is danger, especially from predators. Jesus called out the predator by name. King Herod. Or, "that fox," which if you've ever had chickens, you know they're the worst kind of predator. The pathway to Jerusalem leads to the cross. And out of compassion Jesus willingly goes.

One of the many questions we ask ourselves during Lenten Season is, “Who or what is the Jerusalem of the day in which one lives?” I love that quote. It’s by a New Testament professor at Luther Seminary named Alan Hultgren. Let me say it again, “Who or what is the Jerusalem of the day in which one lives?” I guess another way to frame that is, “What is the cross on which one is willing to be crucified?” What is your Jerusalem? Now here’s where we need to part ways because I can’t answer that question for you. I find it difficult to answer that question for myself sometimes, but whenever I get stuck in a rut and find myself wandering with no direction, I go back to that wilderness experience I had in 1983 when I decided to follow Jesus. Who am I and to whom do I belong? What and where is my Jerusalem? Where is that place where I stand firm and unmoving even at the risk of death?

Let’s take a look at another song that may not be considered a church song by many people. In fact, some people might think it’s a silly song. I know that whenever it played on the radio when I was in junior high and high school, we’d all laugh for the wrong reasons. I’m talking about Bob Dylan’s song *Everybody Must Get Stoned*. The song was *not* about smoking pot. The song was about our Jerusalem. “Who or what is the Jerusalem of the day in which ones lives.” Dylan writes –

Well, they'll stone you when you walk all alone
They'll stone you when you are walking home
They'll stone you and then say you are brave
They'll stone you when you are set down in your grave
But I would not feel so all alone
Everybody must get stoned

This is part of our Lenten journey. When Jesus turns his face toward Jerusalem, we must decide whether we will follow him there to the end. Who and what is the Jerusalem of the day in which *you* live? May you discover or maybe even re-discover the answer to this question on your Lenten Journey. Thirty four more days left.