

The Second Sunday of Lent

February 24, 2013

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalm 27

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“Herod wants to kill you.” That’s not true at all; Jesus knows that it’s simply not true, yet here come the Pharisees claiming that they are warning Jesus to stay away from Jerusalem, to go and hide.

Why? Because they know that Jesus has won the ongoing spiritual, religious confrontation. The Pharisees cannot refute what Jesus says or explain what Jesus does.

Jesus has traveled a long road engaged in preaching and teaching, in healing and miracles; you can be sure that the Pharisees have been with him as observers every inch of the way. There is no religious or philosophical argument to be made, so they resort to a threat.

What is the final straw for the Pharisees? It’s Jesus’ statement that “the first shall be last and the last shall be first.” In other words, those that give lip service to their faith and have made a dry, stale legality of Israel’s relationship to its God, no matter what their credentials might be, will be superseded by those who actually practice the commandments and live out their faith, even the Gentiles.

The Pharisees know who and what Jesus means, and so they make this false warning. It is in their interest to keep Jesus from Jerusalem. As long as he remains a prophet in the towns and villages, Jesus is a local marvel, a celebrity; in Jerusalem, Jesus will become a significant force; we need only witness the joyful crowds of what we call Palm Sunday, proclaiming Jesus as Messiah as he enters the city.

The Pharisees were not sent by Herod; they despise Herod. Herod is not a Jew; he's an Idumean from the desert region south of Judea. He is a king of Israel in name only, superimposed on Israel by Roman politics and power. He is a religious affront to all orthodox Jews, particularly the Pharisees.

In a few chapters, Luke tells us that Herod sees no threat in Jesus. Herod has no interest in local religion; he knows nothing of local traditions or history. When three wise men appear in Jerusalem, Herod has to consult his staff on the prophecy about a Messiah's being born in Bethlehem. Herod's job is to preserve order. This traveling rabbi is no political or social threat that Herod can see. Luke tells us, a few chapters later, that Pilate sends Jesus to Herod and that Herod is happy to meet Him, had heard about Him, and wanted to talk with Him. In fact, in the Greek, Luke tells us that Herod "thought nothing" of Jesus. He saw no threat at all.

How does Jesus respond to these threats? Perhaps He sees that the end time is approaching, the plan is unfolding and nearing its fulfillment; that, ironically, even Pharisees and an Idumean king are playing their part. He simply says that He must go to Jerusalem; it is there that the great event must take place, as all great events in the history of Israel have taken place. Jerusalem will be an end and a beginning.

It will take Jesus "three days to finish His course," three apparently dark days from death to Resurrection.

What of the Pharisees? Jesus tells them that their “house is forsaken.” Actually the words mean your house, the Israel that you have made, “is left to you.”

In His Holy Name.