

St. Giles Episcopal Church  
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Lent 2 – Luke 13:31-35 and Philippians 3:17-4:1  
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Christian life is complex and multifaceted. As we journey through the liturgical year, the church reminds us of this and helps us focus on one aspect after another of what it means to be a follower of Jesus and a member of the Christian community. In Advent we are reminded that we are a people who are waiting in hopeful expectation for the coming of Jesus. In the Christmas season we are reminded that God has come among us and shared our human life, vulnerable as we are. In the season of Epiphany we are reminded that God continues to be made manifest to us as God was made manifest to those who saw the infant Jesus. In Lent we are reminded that, though we have been made in the image of God and with the goal of becoming transformed into the likeness of Christ, we have thus far fallen short of what we are meant to be and are therefore in need of repentance and God's forgiveness. Lent prepares us for the most sacred time in the church year, Holy Week, when we remember and relive the events of Christ's life which have formed and shaped the Christian community – Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the foot washing, the last supper, Judas' betrayal, Jesus' trial and crucifixion, Christ's descent into hell, and his resurrection from the dead. In the Easter season we are reminded that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ we see and know that God has won the final victory over death and evil. And finally, in the season of Pentecost we are reminded that from the birth of the church, the Holy Spirit has been given to us, to guide us into truth, to unite us in love, and to empower us to do God's work in the world and to become the people God, in God's limitless love, wants us to be.

Christian life and faith are all of this, and more, simultaneously. It is difficult to keep all of this in our minds and hearts at any one time. And we tend to forget parts of the whole truth. It may be easier for some of us to remember the cross than the empty tomb, or we may lose sight of the fact that the Holy Spirit is still at work in the church and in each Christian soul, helping us to follow Christ faithfully. The church year cycles us through key aspects of our faith, offering us both comfort and challenge.

Lent is a challenging season, when we hear challenging gospel readings. This morning's passage from Luke is referred to as Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. It is a poignant, heart-rending passage.

First, let's go over some background information. It may surprise you that the Pharisees seem to be on Jesus' side in this passage, warning him that Herod wants to kill him. We are most familiar with the Pharisees as the people who find fault with Jesus and whom Jesus speaks to and of with criticism.

The Pharisees were Jews, not professionally associated with the temple in Jerusalem, who wanted people to take religious law and observance seriously in their daily lives, at all times and everywhere, not only in the temple. We can't quarrel with this idea. Wouldn't you be surprised if I said from this pulpit, "As long as you come to church on Sunday and participate in the service properly, you don't need to think about God from Monday to Saturday, and there's no reason for you to try to lead a good Christian life on those days either." That would be blasphemous!

The problem was that some of the Pharisees were so focused on the details of religious observance that they lost the bigger picture. Think of the Pharisees who condemned Jesus for healing on the Sabbath because that broke the rule of not working

on the Sabbath. Jesus rebuked them because they did not see that healing, doing good to someone in need, was God's work and more important than the strict observance of Sabbath law. This is not just a "Jewish problem." There have certainly always been Christians who get focused on certain "proper" behaviors or beliefs and miss the greater messages of our faith, such as humility and mercy and charity.

Some of the Pharisees who did not reject Jesus came to warn him that he was in danger. Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great, was the man who had John the Baptist killed and would later communicate with Pilate about Jesus before the crucifixion. It was rumored that Jesus was John the Baptist come back to life. So naturally, Herod would want to kill Jesus. Jesus tells the Pharisees to pass on a message to "that fox" Herod: that regardless of Herod's threat, Jesus was going to continue doing the work of God – healing and casting out demons – until the time came for him to go to Jerusalem to die.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, to be killed, when he said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the 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, and you were not willing!" This lament is almost too much to bear. Jesus wanted to protect the people of Jerusalem from harm, like a hen protects her chicks from danger. And instead of being able to enter Jerusalem to carry out this loving intention, Jesus knows that he will enter Jerusalem to be rejected and killed himself. This is terrible, isn't it? Love rejected, mocked, and murdered. One of the greatest tragedies of human life, a tragedy from which Jesus was not spared. Truly there was no limit to what Jesus would bear to be Emanuel, God with us.

Jesus loves us, and he desires to gather us as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. We need God's protection, and we want God's love. Nevertheless, though we may hear Jesus' call to come under his wings, we are not always willing. Lent is a season when we are called to look at this and reflect on this question: What is keeping you, what is keeping me, from running to Jesus to receive his love and care? What holds us back? There are so many possibilities!

The service of Ash Wednesday reminded us of some: pride, self-indulgent appetites and ways, our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts (Book of Common Prayer, page 268). The Church has a centuries-old tradition of identifying seven deadly sins that keep us from loving God: pride, lust, avarice, gluttony, envy, anger, and sloth. There are many ways to articulate what keeps us from accepting and returning God's love. The important thing is for each of us to look within our souls and honestly identify what is keeping us away from God. Then we will know what we need to "give up" for Lent and always.

In his letter to the Philippians, St. Paul reminds us of an important fact: "Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). This earth is not our true home. One theologian has referred to Christians as "resident aliens." Haven't you ever felt the truth of this? Our true home is with God. We are on our way to God. Why not make the journey easier by giving up whatever holds us back from running to our Lord, trusting in God whose glory is always to have mercy. Amen.