Biblical Text: Luke 13:31-35

**Introduction**

Luke tells us in his introduction to his gospel that “it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account.” He doesn’t tell us who his “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” were, merely that their stories were delivered to him. And it is Luke alone who often records details full of pathos.

“Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”

“The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away…”

“"But now…let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.”

“Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent.”

There are whole Russian novels compressed into those spare lines.

Our Gospel reading for today contains so many of those lines it is hard to read, one after the other.

**Text**

“Go tell that fox, ‘Behold, I case out demons and perform cures today, tomorrow and the third day I finish my course.”

The fox referred to is Herod. Herod who had imprisoned and then killed Jesus’ cousin and forerunner – John the Baptist. Herod who had been taught a low cunning growing up in his Father’s house. Herod, called the Great – the one behind the massacre of the Holy Innocents – didn’t mind killing his own children. It’s a pun in the original language – son and pig sounding similar, but the Emperor Augustus joked that is was “better being Herod’s pig than his son.” Yet this Herod survived his paranoid father. And he survived a palace of his brother’s wife now being his. And her daughter conning him over the head of the Baptist. He survived rebellions, and different Romans like Pilate, and the scheming of Pharisees and the Jerusalem temple. Nobody ever claimed that Herod was smart. But he was a fox. And maybe after killing John, the fame of Jesus was growing a bit large. Too big for the Galilee. And a fox doesn’t like tall poppies. Hence the Pharisees who wanted to see Jesus dead taking some glee telling him, “Herod wants to kill you.”

Jesus words are the words back to a fox. Don’t expend yourself. Don’t worry your only the paranoid survive brain. My time in the sun is short. Today, tomorrow, maybe a third. I will do the deeds of the messiah. Everyone else will miss them when they are gone. But you – Herod – don’t worry. My time is drawing to a close. Also don’t worry because my fate is not yours. “No prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.”

**Moral**

This first line of pathos for me is an appeal to our fox like nature. The sayings of Jesus often have two meanings. To those who are worried about worldly pomp and power – their fox like nature doesn’t have to worry a thing about Jesus – anything he says or anything he does. His kingdom is not of this world. You can easily look at the man and see another dead peasant. And quickly return to the concerns of this body and life. Jesus might look for a second as something formidable, but give is a day or too and that gnawing in your gut or that hollow in your heart should pass.

But to those who might recognize the time. That we flower and fade like the grass of the field or the lilly. Hear a day or two, maybe three, and then gone. And the good news might come to us once, or a second time, or if blessed a third, but that the gospel can be like rain in the desert. You don’t know when or if it will come again. If you recognize the time. Our fox like nature should grab it. Even if we can’t explain why, today is the day to listen. Today is the day to repent and believe. Because tomorrow comes. And Jesus leaves. And its over. And the demons and the plagues might remain. This short window is the time for healing.

**Christology**

That line gives way to the high lament. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem…How often would I have gathered you…and you would not.”

All these things have been given for understanding.

And the first bit of our understanding here is who God is. God is the one who longs to gather. He longs to gather the city in outright rebellion against him. The one that kills the prophets and stones those sent to it. The love of God is such that he loves his enemies. And the image is a pastoral one. “As a hen gathers her brood under her wings.” Paul was the city boy, Jesus was the country boy. And Jesus often uses these pastoral images that we – who might believe that our food comes from the store – just don’t get. This one is an image of distress. When the weather is cold or inclement. When the fox is attacking the hen house. The hen hides the chicks. David Lyle Jeffries comments, “this image will have special poignancy for anyone who has seen after a grassfire the burned carcass of a prairie chicken or pheasant that has sheltered and saved perhaps one or two, though seldom all, of her chicks.” If you’ve had chickens, you know they are just about the dumbest animals on the planet. But nothing is more courageous than the rooster under attack, or the hen gathering the chicks. God longs to gather his people to save them from the coming fire. That is who Jesus is.

“But you would not.” That is toward Jerusalem. A city that had hardened its heart more than Pharoah. A city that would not be gathered. That would rather go to destruction than welcome their messiah.

And this is how God acts in this world. He does not force people into the gathering. His Kingdom is not one of conquest. But neither does the Kingdom go unannounced. The Word of God does announce the Kingdom’s presence. The messiah does present himself. And the time is announced. We know what is coming. We are without excuse.

Jerusalem would not. And Jerusalem’s hardness remains until this very day. But today you have heard. Jesus wishes you to be gathered. To take comfort under his wing. These things are given for our understanding. Know the choice you make.

**Eschatological**

Which leaves us with one last saying. “Behold, your house is forsaken. You will not see me until you say, ‘blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

If we harden our hearts to the gathering of Jesus, we doom our house. Jerusalem would be destroyed within the lifetime of those hearing. But the interplay of words here – forsaken and sight – is something to ponder.

When “The ONE” has left, when you’ve been cast away, even if it is by our own design, you could be in Arizona heat and everything is still cold. When you can’t even catch a glimpse of God – that is foresaken. When the clock is at zero and you lost, that is foresaken. It’s a terrible feeling. And in many circumstances there is nothing that we can do. It’s over. But that is not the way of God.

If you hear the refrain, sing along. “Blessed is he who comes.” Humble your hearts in repentance. Be gathered in faith like little children. On that day, you will see Jesus.

That day can be in the day of Grace. That day can be today.

That day can also be on the day of judgement. Because every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

Today is the day to leave behind the gloom haunts of sadness. The foresaken. Be gathered to Christ. Join together with angels and archangels and all the hosts of heaven. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.”

And Blessed will be the house where Christ has made his home.