

SERMON FOR SUN. MARCH 13, 2022

Lent 2C 2022 Lk 13:31-35 Risky Business

Dear fellow redeemed of, by and for Christ, in today's Gospel lesson, we heard Jesus' lament, "**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!**"

What sadness must have been in Jesus' voice as He spoke those words. He is a Savior rejected. He wanted to save, rescue, and protect His people; from sin, death, and devil, but they would not have it. They weren't interested. Why? Because it would involve the one thing they did not want to do: repent.

For you see, our old Adam and the world at large consider **repentance to be risky business**. Repentance means that I have to admit that I am not the person I think I am or want to be.

Repentance means that I have to admit that I am under another authority – one outside of me. Repentance means that I have to acknowledge that what someone else says about me (that I have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,) is true.

All of those things are very hard to do, whether you lived in Jesus' day, or today.

Our world tells us that perhaps the worst thing you can do is accept someone else's opinion about who you are. You create your own truth, we are told. Who you are is right for you.

No one has the right to impose their morals, or beliefs, upon you. Your decisions are right for you.

And so, the world says, if someone tells you you're a sinner or that the choices you've made are wrong, don't believe it! That might be **their truth**, but it doesn't have to be yours.

All choices are equally valid, so don't let anyone judge you.

Yet at the same time as this attitude reigns in our world – this self-rule, this so-called freedom to be whoever we want to be, we still try to get others to agree with our choices and accept who we are. We want our choices affirmed; we want to feel good about ourselves.

And so, what humanity and popular culture have really done is not free ourselves – we have simply exchanged one authority for another. We have exchanged timeless truths for trends and fads and momentary pleasures.

And so enslaved to the moment, credit card debt is at an all-time high. Enslaved to the whims of popular culture, some churches constantly change and "update" their teachings and their worship to attract church "shoppers."

As a result, we no longer know who we are. Knowledge of history is gone. Those who believe the absolute Truth of He who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life are ignored, shunned, and ridiculed.

We have, as a society, made a great shift – from the objective to the subjective.

In other words, what matters is not outside of me, the objective reality – what matters is only what is inside of me.

What matters is not what others think or what they need, but what I think or need.

What matters is not the truth, but so-called happiness. That's a core American ideal, isn't it? You know, we have rights to "***Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness!***"

But such an attitude leaves no room for repentance. In fact, there is no room for Jesus, for if I am accountable to no one but myself, then I don't need Jesus to save me from some arbitrary rules about how I should behave.

But this attitude, as modern as it sounds, is also quite ancient. This *defiance* also happened with the prophet Jeremiah, and as we heard, with Jesus.

When a prophet like Jeremiah challenges the status quo, he is met with cries of indignation and outrage. What gives Jeremiah the right to say we're not good enough? What gives him the right to say God is displeased and call us to change our evil ways?

And why should we listen to him? We have our own prophets and priests over here who will tell us what we want to hear. Yes, we will listen to them!

And when Jesus came along – he was met with rejection, cries of indignation and charges that he was the evil one, in league with the devil.

Who are you, Jesus, to say that you know the truth and we don't? Who are you to tell us we're not good enough? What gives you the right to call us to repentance? O Jerusalem, Jerusalem.

Sadly, nothing has changed; we defiantly reject objectively based criticism from our parents, friends, and God.

You can't tell me! I'll listen to these others, who will tell me what I *want* to hear. Which is just as the scriptures predicted.

Paul writes to Timothy, "**For the time will come when men will not tolerate sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around themselves teacher to tell them what their itching ears want to hear.**"

Rejecting the joy that Christ offers, we settle for whatever we think will make us happy. Just give me a couple of friends, a dog, and a TV, and life is good. But is that *really* what life is all about?

And so, we conclude that **repentance is risky business**. To be brought to repentance means I don't to call my own shots. It means there is an authority outside of *me*. It means there is an objective truth. It means giving up control.

It means that I have been going in the wrong direction. It means that I am a sinner.

And that's **risky business!** Repentance is embarrassing. It's humiliating. It's humbling. And so, many people refuse. It's simply too scary.

Repentance is scary – **unless** we know the One in authority over us. **Unless** we know His promises to those who repent.

To the world, us admitting our weakness and failure means we'll be looked down upon and seen as something less than the world thinks we should be.

But remember, the world is fallen. It's no friend of ours. It's part of an unholy trinity; Satan, our sinful flesh, and the world.

But repentance is not a dirty word; it's an expectation. According to Luther, it's to be our daily activity.

However, repentance isn't risky business, it's the key to unlocking blessings.

Before God, admitting our weakness and failure– **to be enabled by the Holy Spirit to repent** – means not ridicule or humiliation, but mercy, care, and forgiveness.

It means to be under the wings of our Savior – under His love and protection. Here in God's church, the One in authority over us is not a treacherous tyrant but a loving Father.

Here, the ultimate authority is not looking to use or take advantage of us but care for us and lay down His life for us. He commands us to repent, so He can forgive us.

He teaches us the truth not to enslave us but to set us free from the enslavements of the world.

And so as we repent, the hands into which we fall are hands which know the pain of nails, which know the pain of rejection, suffering and struggle.

Our Savior knows the road that we, by nature, prefer only leads to death and destruction. When we give up the desire for self-determination, we fall into His arms which rescue and forgive.

Here is the voice which doesn't just tell us what **we want to hear, but what we need to hear.**

Here is the One who doesn't demand that we sacrifice ourselves for Him, but who sacrifices Himself for us. Here is the One Who is here for us always, even to the end of the age.

And not simply in some spiritual, mystical way, but in flesh and blood. That we can taste and touch and feel. Giving us Himself, His life, and His forgiveness. Take and eat.

And in repentance, acknowledging our weakness and failure and need, we receive these gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, and we are freed.

Freed from this world and its life-devouring demands. Freed to truly live, for in receiving these gifts, you find that you have received much more than you were seeking.

You receive something much more than “happiness” – which is here today and gone tomorrow; more than friends that come and go; much more than broken promises and empty pleasures.

No, here, in the freedom of Christ, and His love and forgiveness is true contentment. And with contentment, joy. And that is something quite different than happiness.

You see, happiness is just the opposite of sadness – but joy is much deeper than that.

Godly joy is present even when there is no objective reason for you to feel joyful. You can be joyful in plenty or joyful in need. Joyful in trouble or joyful in triumph.

How can that be? Because our joy is not grounded in us, in what we think, or in our *emotions* – it is grounded in Christ.

And therefore, it cannot be taken from us. This world and its things may come and go.

But the joy of Christ, the joy of His life and forgiveness, the joy of His promises and freedom, last forever.

And who do we see that sort of joy in? We see it in Jesus.

As the gradual appointed for today states, **“Oh, come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

This is the joy that Jeremiah and Jesus are calling us to. And as we repent, we receive this joy in the freedom and forgiveness of our sins, no matter what our worldly circumstances may be.

And if repentance seems like risky business, it is far riskier to not repent. As scripture states, **“if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins...it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”**

But when the Holy Spirit leads us to repentance and we admit our need for a savior from sin, God will forgive us those sins for Jesus’ sake and in the final analysis, we receive much more than we give up.

We receive all that we were vainly seeking in our rebellion but could not find, the joy and the peace that comes from knowing and following Christ Jesus, who is the one thing needful. **Amen.**