

I must be on my way.

Luke 13:31- 35



What did you hear in the Gospel reading this morning?

The wonderful image of God as mother hen gathering her chicks? Or Herod as a fox and Jerusalem as a hen?



The lament over Jerusalem knowing that it was destroyed in the lifetime of those writing and reading this Gospel?



The mention of 'the third day' and dying making you think of the cross and Easter? Or the "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" making you think of the communion?



Or did you hear the very determined "I *must* be on my way, for it is *impossible* for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem"?



Just a week after hearing the temptation for Jesus to throw himself off the spire of the Temple and God will save him, we hear Jesus say boldly that he is heading to Jerusalem to die! And not just that it might happen, but that he *must* go there! Why must?

Is the 'must' about timing? Just as Herod the Great was foiled in his attempt to kill the child, and the angry crowd at Nazareth were foiled from throwing Jesus off the cliff, this is Jesus saying Herod cannot get me now, the story has more to go.

Is the 'must' about Jerusalem? Falling into the hands of Herod and dying like John the Baptist would not have achieved Jesus mission; Jerusalem, and through her Rome and Empire, must hear the message.

Or is the 'must' about the divine imperative for Jesus death? I am casting out demons and performing cures, but my real mission is to die; the real defeat of evil and path to wholeness is through the cross. I am not just a prophet speaking an uncomfortable message, it is God's plan that I must die.

Whatever your understanding of the cross – the price of deeply imbedded sin, the need for people to be confronted with the depths of humanity, the evils of politics and power, or the reconciliation point of God and humanity – the divine intention contained in 'must' is a bit of a shakeup. There was and is no other way, Jesus *must* go to the cross. And the natural follow on of that is to hear Jesus say, "If you wish to be my disciple, you *must* take up your cross and follow me." The divine intent, as it was in answering the temptations, is to surrender self-control and self-determination – security and comfort – and embrace God's will and way.

Some recent research has found that young Christians are no longer grabbed by John 3:16 – 'God so loved the world that he gave his only son' – as a key text for their faith. The preference is for Jeremiah 29:11 – 'For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for your harm, to give you a future with hope'. In some ways this follows what I have just said; embracing God's will and way, taking up God's plan for your life. But it is actually a rejection of 'must', a rejection of the cross. The heart of the Jeremiah reading is the phrase, 'plans for your welfare and not your harm', a promise that God's plan aligns with our desire for security and comfort. And that is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ who must go to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem has a complex place in the history and understanding of Israel as we read it in scripture. It is the place of the temple and the presence of God. At the same time, Jerusalem is the home of the king and all the wrongs and apostasy and religious corruption that led to the Exile. Shortened to Salem, which is very close to Shalom, Jerusalem evokes peace and prosperity for all of Israel. At the same time, it is the big city full of politics and power and money and corruption. That complexity sums up humanity and so Jerusalem stands for all of Israel and stands for all of us. We are all a mixture of divine and good intents, and human and broken responses. We all have a place at the cross and the call to take up our own cross. The image of the mother hens and the chicks is a very comforting one, except for the sting in the end, 'but you were not willing!' All that God had done for the people of Israel, all that God has done and is doing, is not enough for people to behave like chicks and run to the wings of the mother hen.

And so, Jesus must go to Jerusalem and only those who recognise his coming, who recognise the divine imperative of the cross and say, 'blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord', will know the comfort and joys of being in God's will.

The Lenten journey, or Lenten discipleship is about understanding and accepting ourselves so that we can better understand the cross and the empty tomb. We are looking at scripture and talking about Jesus and God, but there is always, "what does that mean for me?" Jesus must go to the cross because something drastic was required to reach people, us. While we may not feel very evil, or guilty, the cross was a divine imperative and so there must be something wrong with all of us. And was no good trying to fix a few people – prophets and leaders and visionaries – Jesus must go to Jerusalem to a very public death that involves us all. Something that causes us all to say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord', and run to God, the mother hen, as chicks wanting the comfort of her wings.

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