

**“BROODING IN LENT”**  
**Genesis 15:1-12; 17-18; Psalm 27; Luke 13:31-35**  
**February 28, 2010**  
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Lent is a time of repentance and confession, so I will begin with my own confession. When I realized it was Tuesday evening and Susan still didn't have a sermon title for the newsletter because creativity was scarce, I grabbed what came to me. Later, in pondering more carefully the word brooding, I was concerned. To brood, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, means to think or worry anxiously about something. That doesn't seem to be the appropriate attitude for Lent. Of course, it also means to sit on (eggs in a nest, usually) in order to help them hatch. Therefore, I hope to be able to share some reflections which will give you at least one image or concept to sit on this week, that it may hatch into a deeper understanding of your faith on this journey. This is the second Sunday of Lent, a journey we make from Ash Wednesday to Easter—both an inward and an outward journey. For some people Lent is a burden to get through. As Ryan mentioned in his thought for the week, we are surrounded by bare walls in the sanctuary; and even more, the nails remain there, to remind us that something is definitely missing. For others Lent is welcomed as a time for reflection and spiritual growth. Some years it feels more appropriate or easier than others to remain focused on that journey. How many of you have made some commitment which you are trying to keep throughout these weeks, either something you have given up or something you have taken on to help keep you conscious of God's call in your life? [This one doesn't require a show of hands:] Of those of you who have made such a commitment, have you been able to remain constant and faithful to your promise?

In the passage from Luke's gospel this morning we are given a view of Jesus as absolutely intent on his journey. While he has not yet reached Jerusalem, he is on his way, carrying on his ministry. When some Pharisees try to dissuade him from that by apparently warning him of Herod's threat (this is Herod Antipas, the son of the Herod we hear about at Jesus' birth), Jesus brushes them aside: "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.'" This is not a tender picture of Jesus; this is a man who knows his purpose and whose inner strength is far greater than that of Herod, the earthly ruler. The growl of that sly fox will later be revealed to be something altogether different, but for now Jesus remains steadfastly committed to the journey of ministry on which God has sent him.

It is this steadfastness that *we* try to imitate in our Lenten disciplines. It is a remarkable steadfastness, which I have seen in only a few people of faith in my own life. Most of us will wander off our purposeful track many times. Indeed, sometimes we make commitments in Lent which become a hindrance to our faith because we end up feeling guilty about not being faithful to the commitment—whether that is giving up dessert or chocolate, for example, or reading the Bible every day. That guilt becomes our focus, rather than the promise of God to accept our genuine repentance and to use us. So, I would challenge you to remember that this is a journey of repentance—with a purpose. That purpose being the growth of your ministry in making the gospel of Jesus visible and tangible for others. Hold onto Jesus' steadfastness in your journey of faith, knowing that he walks it with you, not in judgment but in hope and promise.

On his journey forward, Jesus knew he was facing the same reception which the other prophets had met in Jerusalem—a certain death. For the author of Luke, in both the gospel and Acts, it is important to see that Jesus' death is never mentioned as necessary for salvation. Luke doesn't have a theory of atonement in which Jesus

had to die for us to be saved. However, Jesus' purpose was to seek out the lost, to bring release to the captives; his death becomes the ultimate evidence of God's relationship to God's people and hope for their repentance.

Jerusalem represents the center of the Jewish faith, the place where the people believe God dwells with them in the temple. Yet, in this passage we see how it also represents what can happen when religious and institutional standards become aligned with political power. Jesus, from the outset of his ministry in Luke's gospel, takes on the prophetic role. Tending to the marginalized in society, curing the blind, setting captives free, and, worse yet, claiming that the first shall be last and the last first, as he has done in the verses just before this passage—these are seditious in the eyes of those in power, both religious and political authorities. Jesus challenges all of the status quo. Like the prophets of Israel before him, Jesus pronounces both judgment and grace.

Jerusalem also represents institutional power and authority that establishes and defends standards for God's people and silences, or marginalizes, all who criticize it, or offer a different way. In this period of Lent, we must search deeply in ourselves, to determine where we are a part of that Jerusalem today. How am I either consciously participating in acts which silence the prophets of our day, or, by simply going about my daily life unconsciously participating in such acts? For example, it can be as simple as reading the labels of foods or other products I buy—can I find a fair trade product, or is this produced in a sustainable manner? For me, the area I have become more attuned to recently is the ongoing anguish in Israel and Gaza. It is far away; it is horribly complex. But I am discerning in my heart that my ignorance is no excuse; that there may be ways I can make a difference in choices I make which can help in making roads toward peace. Turning our hearts to the many issues in our world can be overwhelming; there is so much that needs to be done. However, that is a value of being part of this community of faith—we each do our part in one area where we feel called, knowing that others are addressing other issues. And we can support each other in the process of being more conscious.

As Jesus addresses Jerusalem, however, the place of his certain death, he does not meet it with the defensive and sharp words he has for Herod. Rather, we see the compassion and anguish of a God who wants to relate with love to God's people: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to hear, that they may eventually hatch out into attitudes and acts which manifest the gospel of compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation. For so God broods over us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

