

God's Panoramic Perspective

Welcome to worship on this second week of Lent! Today marks the start of week two of our "Reframed" worship series, which invites us to see new possibilities for our lives as we journey toward the cross of Good Friday and the empty tomb of Easter morning. On Ash Wednesday, and again last week during the Sermon on the Steps, we found Jesus in the wilderness in a battle of temptation with Satan. For each temptation the devil threw at Jesus, He offers a response from Scripture that helps us view God's panoramic perspective – the big picture.

This morning, we're going to explore the deep desire each of us has to belong. We want to be part of something bigger than ourselves. Each of us wants to find a place of connection where we're loved, appreciated, and cared for by others. We begin with the image of an empty picture frame, anticipating the picture which might eventually fill it. If you have a Bible or Bible app, turn with me to Luke 13:31-35. **Read Luke 13:31-35.**

Our Gospel lesson from Luke happens while Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. It's near the end of His three year long earthly ministry in which He's taught and led the twelve apostles and has shown them what it means to have a life-changing relationship with the living God. At least one commentary suggests that during this time Jesus was traveling south, along the east bank of the Jordan River, in what was then the land of Perea, and now modern-day Jordan. The country was ruled by Herod Antipas, whose father, Herod the Great, had killed all the babies in Bethlehem shortly after Jesus was born.

Herod Wants to Kill You

"At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to Him, 'Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill You,'" (Luke 13:31). Like father, like son. Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, is the one who now wants to kill Jesus. At the time, Herod Antipas was one of the world's most powerful rulers.

Appointed by Rome, he put on the act of a devout Jew, but Scripture and history prove that he wasn't. Herod Antipas doesn't fit in the frame of what a good Jew is. This is the same guy who killed Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist. He divorced his wife, married his sister-in-law, and the Gospels allude to a potential relationship between him and his niece-turned-step-daughter, Salome. His women problems are the stuff of a bad Jerry Springer episode – but they really happened! He built a new capital city for his kingdom on top of a Jewish cemetery, and named it Tiberius after the then-emperor. Do you know how many Jews came to live in his capital? None! The place was inhabited by Greeks and Romans.

Jesus doesn't seem bothered by the death threats that Herod's flunkies come to deliver to Him. He seems unfazed by the Pharisees – He's already spelled out what He thinks of them and their hypocrisy a few chapters back. They don't fit in the frame of

what a good Jew is, either. And we know Jesus also has a frame that He's starting to fit in with the religious establishment in Jerusalem. He's beginning to fit in a "Most Wanted" mugshot poster.

Filthy Fox

Jesus responds to Herod's threat. "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach My goal,'" (verse 32). This statement is remarkable. Jesus calls Herod a fox. When I was a teenager – and maybe some of you did this too – when we were in the locker room, talking about girls, we might say she was a fox, meaning we thought she was cute.

Did girls do that, too? I don't know. But that's not what Jesus means here. He doesn't think Herod's cute. What He's saying is actually very insulting. In Jewish culture, foxes were unclean animals. They were scavengers that came out at night to hunt weaker animals, or eat dead things they found laying around. They were viewed as filthy, sneaky, cowardly animals, that no one wanted around.

What's an insulting term we might use today towards someone we think very little of? Basically, that's what Jesus is doing in this verse. "Go tell that piece of bull-trash that I'm busy doing what I need to do, and I'm going to keep on doing what I need to do, and don't have time for his nonsense," is basically what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is real clear on what He intends to do here.

Jesus Keeps On Keepin' On

He's going to keep on driving out demons. He's going to keep healing people. Then He says, "and on the third day I will reach My goal." He's on the road to Jerusalem. His goal – the whole reason He came – was to reach Jerusalem. To go to the cross.

This is Jesus' primary purpose, friends. He came to die for us. To set us free from sin and death. That's His goal. As His followers, we must never forget that He came and paid a terrible price, because of His deep love for us and for all people.

Well, He elaborates on this next. "In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!" (verse 33). He already knows what's waiting for Him when He gets into Jerusalem. He knows there's a cross – and He also knows, because He's fully God as well as fully human – that there's an empty tomb.

Jesus Laments Over Jerusalem

In the meantime, He laments over Jerusalem. He says, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing," (verse 34). In His heart, Jesus carries the memories of Isaiah, who according to tradition, was sawn in half; Jeremiah, who was stoned after repeatedly being thrown into cisterns and cast out of the city; Ezekiel, who shared a similar fate after experiencing more than his fair share of suffering. The very ones God's people

should embrace and honor more than any other were murdered for simply doing what God called them to do. The voices of those who came to help usher God's people back to times of prosperity and peace were the voices which were silenced.

Think back for a moment, if you will, to a home where you felt loved. Maybe it was the home you were brought up in. It might be your first home as an adult, out on your own, where you skimmed and saved as best you could to make it in this world. Maybe it's a home where you raised, or are raising, your kids and have made lifelong memories that you treasure to this day. Maybe it's the home you've been dreaming of settling in for your entire life – and you're looking forward to a rapidly approaching retirement to get there.

Picture that place that fully encapsulates what it means to really belong. A place of connection, abundance, safety, joy, and above all else, a place of unconditional love. Jerusalem was supposed to be the place of ultimate belonging here on earth – not just for one family, but for the entire nation of Israel. It was supposed to be the one place in the world where God's people felt safety and freedom. It was supposed to be a place of refuge from all the troubles of the world. A place where sacred rites of sacrifice and offering were given with joy and grateful hearts. Jerusalem was supposed to be the physical embodiment of heaven – a place where God's forgiveness, mercy, and justice reigned supreme.

Hen and Chicks

God's people had been spread throughout the world in the diaspora and had experienced exile repeatedly. But they always could find their way back to Jerusalem. The earthly paradise of every God-following Jew. There they would celebrate sacred feasts and enjoy a little bit of heaven on earth. We hear this echoed in Jesus' statement, "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings." Have you ever seen a hen with little chicks? She protects them. Keeps them safe. She'll risk her life against another animal that tries to creep up to get an easy meal. What a beautiful picture of safety and belonging!

But the people wouldn't have it. Jerusalem had tragically become a shell of what it once was, overrun by foreign rulers, ransacked by treacherous neighbors, wrecked by the infighting among the inhabitants of the city itself. The home every Jew longed for was nothing more than a shack down the road where exploitation, murder, and abuse took place. "Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,'" (verse 35). Jesus says this with great sadness in His heart.

The Savior of the world, the Son of God, knows the city may welcome Him with open arms when He travels the Jerusalem Road on Palm Sunday. But He also knows that He will share the same fate of rejection, like the prophets, by the week's end. The question for us in the midst of all this – to apply it to ourselves today – becomes "where did Jesus find belonging?" He found it in His disciples. In the outcast, the widow, the sick, and in anyone else who would listen to Him.

Get in the Picture

Matthew's Gospel has an intriguing story relating to this. A messenger comes to Jesus, and tells Him that His mother and brothers are outside the house He's in, and they want to talk to Him. Jesus responds towards the crowd listening to Him, and says, "Here are My mother and My brothers. Whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven is My brother, sister, and mother." (Matt. 12:47-50). Friends, that includes me and you.

After Grandma Berryman died, most of her stuff ended up at Mom and Dad's. One of the things they brought home was a frame with a picture of Grandmother Strauß. She was a great-great grandma of my Grandma Berryman on her mom's side whose parents came over from Germany in the late 1700's and settled first in Pennsylvania, and then sailed down the Ohio River on a river boat around the time Ohio became a State in 1803. Grandmother Stauß' picture was in an ornately carved frame, which I think may have been made from mahogany. It was a beautiful picture frame – but the grandma, not so much! She looked pretty stern, and I don't think she had teeth.

Anyhow, I don't know what happened to the picture, but it was removed from the frame, and a family portrait was put into it. I think Mom still has that hanging up at her house. The truth is, we all have an innate desire to make it into a family portrait or a group photo. But sometimes, it feels like we aren't part of the family. Jesus knows what it's like to be left out of the photo. In the holiest of cities, even though He's the Son of God, He had no honor there.

Instead, He found connection and belonging in His twelve apostles – and other lives He touched – through interactions, friendships, and deep connections. Jesus invites us into the same deep connection. Not as individuals, though there is an individual component to our faith, to be sure. But rather, as one big family,

encompassing all people. In Jesus' big family portrait, you and I have a place. And so do the folks we don't like. Right now – today – He calls us, and them, to "Get in the Picture," because through His death and resurrection, He welcomes us into the family of God!

Prayer: Covenant-Keeping God, in the glory of the cross Your Son embraced the power of death and broke its hold over Your people. In this time of repentance, draw all people to Yourself, that we who confess Jesus as Lord may put aside the deeds of death and accept the life of Your kingdom. Amen.