

Lent 2-March 13, 2022

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 and Luke 13:31-35

“Finished, for you” *Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad*

Let us pray, Heavenly Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, our strength and redeemer. Amen

Finish this sentence for me. “God helps those who _____.”

We know these words about as well as any bible verse found in scripture. However, this phrase is not a verse found anywhere in scripture. We could say there is some truth in it. God does help, but he not only helps those who help themselves, God especially helps the helpless as we learn in the gospel for today. We might even subscribe to this common phrase when we decide what people with needs, we choose to support. If those in need of help or asking for help are at least making some effort at helping themselves, we often are more inclined to support them. We might even believe after Jesus compared the people of Jerusalem to a brood of chicks that were unwilling to be gathered under the shelter of the wings of a mother hen, we might want to believe that it was God who coined this phrase, “God helps those who help themselves.” as he watches his chicks stubbornly wander away from him.

In this gospel reading for today that has so many images of animals, it is surprising that Jesus didn’t compare the Pharisees to some kind of animal. Their good intentions by warning Jesus about Herod’s desire to kill him sound caring as a mother hen, but their sincerity might be more similar to the craftiness of a fox. Regardless of these Pharisees had real concern for the welfare of Jesus or not, they too wanted Jesus to leave town. Before these Pharisees came to Jesus with their warning, Jesus had just spoken some words to them that they didn’t like hearing. Jesus told them that unless they repented, they would perish. Jesus told them the parable of the unfruitful fig tree and how it should be cut down. Jesus told them that the door to salvation was narrow. The Pharisees were not used to the language that Jesus was using or the authority he used when he spoke. These confused Pharisees were troubled with thought that they had done something wrong and were in need of repenting. They were left wondering if they were the fig tree that needed to be cut down. And they wondered if the door of salvation was too narrow for them. The Pharisees thought if they scared Jesus into fearing for his life, he would leave, and they wouldn’t have to hear these troubling words from Jesus anymore.

But, instead of Jesus thanking the Pharisees for their warning for his safety, Jesus told them to reply to Herod the fox that he was staying where he was because had some business to finish. Not even a death threat from Herod would deter Jesus from completing the ministry that

Jesus had begun. Jesus cared more for preserving the lives of others than he did for preserving his life from Herod's death threats.

For three more days, Jesus would cast out demons. Jesus would cure the sick. Jesus would not take a different course to spare his life. Jesus did not go into hiding or run away scared. Jesus stayed and finished his work.

When Jesus turned his attention toward Jerusalem, we are told that he lamented. Jesus used tender language and metaphors of vulnerable chicks when he lamented about the people of Jerusalem. Jesus wasn't praising that these chicks were leaving the nest of the hen and that they were now able to help themselves. Jesus lamented because he saw the people of Jerusalem as chicks who forgot where they came from and thought that they no longer needed any help from their creator and caregiver. Now that they had been given a jump start from the nest, they thought **they** could finish whatever they needed to do.

In the first lesson for today, we heard about how Abram and Sarai's story started with a promise that they would become the parents of many descendants. They now had reached a point in their lives that they were as helpless as wandering chicks if they thought that they had the power within themselves to finish what they were promised to accomplish. They had no children and now they had long passed the age of becoming parents. Some form of the common phrase, "God helps those who help themselves" has been around as long as creation. There has always been a desire for God's chosen people to flee from God rather than admit they are helpless without him. Likewise, Abram, attempted to finish the promise God had given him by saying that his descendants would come from Eliezer who was from his house. But the Lord said, Abram's descendants would not just come from his house, but from his own issue. God's plan was not for Abram to appoint a father. God's plan for Abram to be the father of many nations. Whatever assistance Abram offered, or objections Abram raised never voided God's promise that was given from the beginning. God was going to finish what Abram and Sarai could never do.

We are told that Jesus was lamenting over Jerusalem. Was Jesus lamenting because the people of Jerusalem were unwilling to help themselves? No, Jesus was lamenting because the people of Jerusalem were unwilling to realize they were helpless without Jesus. But Jesus does not give up on his flock of chicks.

God does not stop his work by lamenting for you as you wander away from his Holy Wings. God has called you again back into his flock with his word. His word that does not leave you wondering, but his word that is good news for you. During the season of Lent, we are reminded of the path Jesus will take to his death. Jesus will not be deterred from this work that he will do for you. Jesus has left nothing for you to finish. Your salvation that Jesus began in you, Jesus has finished, for you. Amen