

The Hearts Desire

Luke 13:31-35

February 28, 2010, 8:56

Yesterday, I began watching the news around 4 pm as Hawaii braced for a tsunami. It was such an odd thing to watch. This kind of stuff seems to happen in poor countries, not the United States. I kept my eye on the television, had the internet on weather channel as I braced for the worst but hoped for the best.

They kept switching from camera to camera as they scanned the beaches waiting for a hint of the fast moving waves to hit the beach. And on one camera was this guy. He didn't work for the news – he was in the water, splashing at the incoming waves as if to say, "You can't hurt me." My jaw dropped as I thought, "This guy is going to get killed." They kept coming back to this guy in the water, who I am sure knew quite well what was going on, but for some reason it didn't click.

As I read today's text, you get a sense of that with Jesus. The Pharisees came to Jesus with the concern that Herod was trying to kill him. It sounds like they were concerned for Jesus, but in reality they were concerned for themselves. Jesus laughs at their concerns, saying that if they read their bibles they would see that the prophets were killed in Jerusalem. He even mocks Herod a little bit. We tend to think of a fox as being sly, but the Jewish connotation was that of a weak cat – in a sense, Jesus was saying, "Herod is just a little pussy cat."

But then Jesus speaks about who he is concerned about, the Jewish people. He sees them and realizes how they so often miss the point. They miss the warnings. They would look upon the mount in the city and saw the Temple and felt, "Nothing can hurt us" but so many Jews thought that before them.

Jesus was looking on a people that were in the midst of a spiritual tsunami. They didn't understand the prophets that they killed so they couldn't understand the Messiah that was in their midst. They didn't know the role they were going to play. They had missed the point before, and they were going to miss it again.

And yet, Jesus cried out to them, "How I have longed to gather you in more arms, but you won't have me." Jesus was crying out to them like I was silently crying out to the guy in the waves, and yet neither heard us. But it didn't stop Jesus from caring. In the midst of a threat upon his own life, he was far more concerned for those who would call for his destruction. He grieved their souls and hoped that they would come back to true faith, and stop depending on religion to save them.

But we live in such a similar time. We wake up and watch the weather and it says it will be clear, but in the afternoon it rains, and we get upset with the weather person, but we saw the clouds gathering, we saw the sky get black, but we kept to the prediction: it won't rain. We believe in ourselves to such a degree that when our intelligence fails us, we are shocked, and then want to punish someone for their arrogance and their failure.

But instead of blaming the people, Jesus says, "I wish you would come back to me. I wish you would stop trusting in yourselves and begin to trust in me."

Even as Christians, we sometimes forget these words. The verse, “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” That verse is so often found on tracts and used as words calling for a person to confess their sins and to accept Jesus. But the verse is in Revelation and it isn’t a call to a non-believer, but to the church in Laodicea.

The church there was a wealthy city, but they thought their wealth would save them. The Bible says that they were neither hot nor cold – lukewarm. They were a people who were complacent in their faith. And when the shepherd called, they didn’t open the door. And yet, the verse after that says these words: “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne.” In other words, Jesus still has hope for these people.

This is the character of our God: He never gives up, even when we have given up on Him. History is replete with people who have lost faith due to an illness that lingered longer than thought it should, or a family member who died before their time. We know people who grew up in the church but have moved away from it because they lost their way. We even know people who used to be very involved in the church but now just kind of go through the paces, never leading, never doing more than the minimum, and we wonder, “What happened?”

Some we forget. Some we try for a while to bring them back, but give up on. Some we never realized they were lost. But Jesus knows each one. And he laments the path they have entered. He desires that they would come back. He patiently stands at the door and knocks. And hopes that one day they will hear, one day that they would return His embrace, that one day they would know the faith they once declared.

This is the desire of our Lord. And His desire for us is to be just as passionate about bringing people back to Him, to bringing churches back to Him. Because we so often get caught up in the politics of the church – arguing about budgets, arguing about building plans, arguing about very human things – instead of doing the work of God. I promise you that Jesus is far less passionate about budgets and long range plans than he is about us sharing our faith with a person who is lost.

We can get so caught up in doing this work of “being the church” and sound so much like that church in Revelation – a church that was so busy being the church that it never heard the voice of it’s master. We can get so caught up in our own desires that we forget God’s desire. We get caught up in “What might happen” and forget what is happening all around us. And when that happens, Jesus calls out to us and says, “Come back to me.”

This is what Lent is about. It is a call to come back to our Lord. To leave the business of politics and “doing church”, and to be reminded of what the church really is suppose to be: people truly caring for one another. It is a call to be embraced by our Savior who wants us far more than we could ever desire Him – and that I hope says quite a lot about our Lord. It is a call that Jesus hopes is heard. It is a call that He hopes we have responded to. It is a call that He hopes becomes our own.