

Glitter
March 17, 2019

Luke 13:31-35

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.' ³²He said to them, '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. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, 300 and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem." ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." '

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Exactly three years ago today, I was lying in a bed at Nash General Hospital, dozing in an epidural-infused haze and waiting to give birth to my son, Teddy. I had begun the day by walking up and down our flat, quiet, and dark street. It was the only way I knew how to get through the contractions as we awaited the arrival of my parents so that we could go to the hospital. You see, we had a sick two-year old at home. We had previously made a plan in which she would go to a neighbor's house when my labor began, but we couldn't send a sick child to a neighbor's house. The sickness had reared its head earlier that evening when I, feeling the first pangs of labor, dropped Mary Eliza off at church for cherub choir. Within five minutes of dropping her off, the assistant was on the run to find me – Mary Eliza had thrown up all over the choir room. So, this particular day – March 17 – has deep significance in my life as a mother. And not just the warm and fuzzy cuddling of a newborn memories. Of course, I have those. But I also have the memories of mothering a sick toddler while 39 weeks pregnant and having contractions. I have memories of waiting for my own mother to arrive while I talked to her on the phone and paced the streets of my neighborhood well after midnight. I have intense bursts of memories that involve kneeling and rocking

through contractions and watching late night tv, receiving the blessed epidural, pushing our boy into this world, and then cradling him in my arms. With all of these memories swirling in my mind today, I find my way into the passage before us from Luke 13 in the latter half of verse 34 – “how often I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wing...” That day 3 years ago, when I was in labor and preparing to give birth, my brood was becoming more complete with the arrival of a second child, one I knew would be a blessing to our family. Today I can tell you that he is that blessing and that I continue to be a mother hen to he and his sister, fiercely protecting them and providing space for nurture. So, I can’t tell you how good it feels, and maybe you’ve experienced this before, too, to find yourself in Scripture. To see yourself in a story. To find your way in to a passage. For an experience you’ve had in your life to be mirrored in something that happened in the Bible. It feels good. It feels right. Because, after all, the Bible is the story of people, of real people, living on this earth and God’s presence with them.

Of course, in this verse, Jesus is talking about specific people in a specific city when he voices his desire. Jerusalem was a special place to Jesus. If you remember, when he was an infant, his parents brought him to the temple to dedicate him to the Lord. When he was 12 he traveled there again for the Passover and got lost in the Temple. And now, around the age of 30 we think, Luke 9:51 tells us that Jesus has “set his face for Jerusalem.” The next few chapters of Luke’s gospel are filled with real stories about Jesus and his disciples as they journeyed toward Jerusalem. Those chapters also feature many of Jesus’ teaching parables – stories that may not have really happened, but that are full of real truth. Finally, in Luke 19, Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and the path to the cross is literally set in stone...in the stone of Jerusalem’s streets and buildings where the events of holy week will unfold. But, before Jesus get there, before we get there, there’s the passage before us today, from Luke 13, when Jesus is in the middle of the journey from his home region of Galilee to the holy city of Jerusalem.

Now, if my way in to this passage isn’t your way in, that’s fine. I have another one for you. How many of you in this sanctuary have ever raised a teenager? Or been a teenager yourself? Do you remember what that was like? Dealing with grades and friends and a sense of new-found freedom and autonomy? Worrying about promposals and college acceptances and weekend

plans? Oscillating between the expectations of your parents and the desires of your own heart? Listening to the various voices who claim to be the wisdom of this age and trying to find the right way? For some reason, verse 34 which describes Jerusalem, reminds me of a teenager. Of being a teenager myself. It says, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!” Now, don’t focus on the murderous imagery here, but rather, what’s behind it. Jerusalem had been a city for about 1000 years by the time Jesus comes on the scene. And during that time, it had enjoyed but a few spurts of good years. Of when there was peace and stability and prosperity. But for much of its history, Jerusalem had been pulled in many directions, by many different people. Much of the Old Testament tells of its struggle to maintain and claim its identity as God’s holy city. And during Jesus’ time, Jerusalem’s struggle was not much different. It was occupied by the Roman Empire which was not Jewish but had its own state religion that worshipped the Emperor. Herod, the fox that Jesus refers to in verse 32 is the Roman ruler of the Palestinian area that includes Jerusalem and he is no friend of the Jews...or the man soon to be deemed their king with a crude sign and a crown of thorns. Despite its occupation by the Romans, much of the city was still controlled by the Jewish religious elite – the Pharisees and Sadducees, whom themselves compete for influence over the people. So, do you see why I think the Jerusalem is kind of like a teenager? The city itself is being pulled in so many different directions. It is struggling with its identity and it is being swayed by the crises of the day. But Jesus, Jesus loves that city. He loves its religious center, the Temple, but more than that, he loves its people. They are who he came to save.

About a month ago, I read the most fascinating article in the New York Times¹. It was about, of all things, glitter jars. As a preschool mom, glitter jars are right up my ally, but this article also showed me how they have something to do with my vocation as a Youth Pastor. The tag line of the article? “A D.I.Y. snow globe full of glitter is an apt metaphor for the emotional chaos of the adolescent brain.” The article was written by Lisa Damour, a psychologist from Ohio, whose discovery of a glitter jar at a professional development event in Dallas a few years ago has changed how she approaches counseling and working with adolescents. Damour writes that glitter jars are actually, “an elegant model of the neurology of

¹<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/12/well/family/how-to-help-teens-weather-their-emotional-storms.html>

the distressed teenager.” You see, because teenage brains go through so much change as they become fully developed and equipped to handle adult decisions, they are, as Damour describes it, “put into a rather delicate position. Though they tend to be highly rational when calm, if they become upset, their new, high-octane emotional structures can overpower their yet-to-be upgraded reasoning capacities, crashing the entire system until it has a chance to reset.” To put it simply, they become like glitter swirling around in a jar of water...you just have to wait until the glitter settles. Adults who love and work with teenagers can’t reason with them or even ask questions during highly emotional events...you just have to sit with them and wait it out. You have to strive to be a steady, strong, loving (and mostly quiet) presence while the glitter settles.

Those of us who are in this sanctuary today and are between the ages of 25-95, we’re way past those teenage years, aren’t we? Long gone is the acne...and the gossip...and the obsession with status...and the oscillating emotions...and the worry that we won’t be accepted...and the glitter storms...Or is it? Maybe the acne is for you...I’m in my 30’s so it has started rearing its ugly head again. In just a few chapters, in Luke 19, the people of Jerusalem, including adults like you and me, will welcome Jesus with palms, or what I call Biblical glitter, on Sunday morning, and then demand his crucifixion on Friday. While our brains are fully developed and capable of adult decisions, sometimes we become like those teenagers we used to be, don’t we? Swayed by the various voices claiming to be the wisdom of our age. Undone by some tragedy that has unexpectedly stricken us. (PAUSE)

I think Lent is the perfect time for us to examine these tendencies within ourselves. Because, let’s be honest. Just like all teenagers have developing brains and do things with those brains that sometimes don’t make sense, all adults have the tendency to occasionally behave in those ways, too. Because we are human. This has been our story since the beginning of time with Adam and Eve and the temptation of the serpent. The story continued as God led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt and they complained like the best 13 year olds I know during their time in the wilderness. God’s people acted like teenagers again when they ignored the prophets that God sent to them, people like Amos and Micah, Isaiah and Ezekiel, behaving like a teenager with the nicest set of Beats headphones money can buy.

So, ancient Jerusalem and her inhabitants’ tendency toward adolescent behavior is part of our story. We cannot escape it or naively think that we are

mature enough to avoid it. You know what's also part of our story? The Biblical story of love and salvation? Psalm 27. It is the psalm of the day according to the lectionary and we heard it a portion of it read aloud earlier and we spoke some of its phrases in our call to worship. This psalm brings together the two ways I suggested that you might find a way into our passage today. It makes me think of motherhood and my own children and it makes me think of the teenagers I'm blessed to pastor here at Westminster. It features truths and desires that I want to equip my children and our children with as they develop into fully human adults. I want to share the Message version of Psalm 27 with you –

Light, space, zest—
that's God!

So, with him on my side I'm fearless,
afraid of no one and nothing.

² When vandal hordes ride down
ready to eat me alive,
Those bullies and toughs
fall flat on their faces.

³ When besieged,
I'm calm as a baby.
When all hell breaks loose,
I'm collected and cool.

⁴ I'm asking God for one thing,
only one thing:
To live with him in his house
my whole life long.
I'll contemplate his beauty;
I'll study at his feet.

⁵ That's the only quiet, secure place
in a noisy world,
The perfect getaway,
far from the buzz of traffic.

⁶ God holds me head and shoulders
above all who try to pull me down.
I'm headed for his place to offer anthems
that will raise the roof!

Already I'm singing God-songs;
I'm making music to God.
⁷⁻⁹ Listen, God, I'm calling at the top of my lungs:
"Be good to me! Answer me!"
When my heart whispered, "Seek God,"
my whole being replied,
"I'm seeking him!"
Don't hide from me now!
⁹⁻¹⁰ You've always been right there for me;
don't turn your back on me now.
Don't throw me out, don't abandon me;
you've always kept the door open.
My father and mother walked out and left me,
but God took me in.
¹¹⁻¹² Point me down your highway, God;
direct me along a well-lighted street;
show my enemies whose side you're on.
Don't throw me to the dogs,
those liars who are out to get me,
filling the air with their threats.
¹³⁻¹⁴ I'm sure now I'll see God's goodness
in the exuberant earth.
Stay with God!
Take heart. Don't quit.
I'll say it again:
Stay with God.

Jesus. Jesus was a man who knew the psalms. The prayer book of God's people since Jerusalem's beginning. So, when I read this psalm, I imagine him. I imagine him saying these words as he gathers his brood under his wings. His brood that includes the people of Jerusalem and the people of Greenville. His brood that includes newborns and toddlers, preteens and adolescents, young adults and parents of teenagers, empty nesters and those blissfully single, grandparents and those with no friends left. Striving to protect them. To shelter them. To love them. To sit with them. To save them. While the glitter storm caused by human life lived in an imperfect world settles. Thanks be to God. Amen.