Jesus Laments Over Jerusalem
Luke 13:31-35
Second Sunday in Lent, Year C March 16, 2025
Choptank Charge Pastor Nan Duerling

Good morning, friends, and welcome on this Second Sunday in Lent. It's great to see you in worship this morning. Last week we were blessed to have Shane Walker, community missionary with Overflow Café with us. Thanks to those of you who made a commitment to support Shane with money and/or prayer, as well as to those of you who have made a commitment to volunteer at the Café. As I've said before, the three churches of the Choptank Charge may be small in number, but we can have an outsized impact on our community as we find ways to serve others in Jesus' name. If you didn't turn in a commitment form last week but would like to do so today, you'll find a large envelope on the altar where you can place your sheet. Just a reminder to those who are planning to give money: Overflow Café is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization whose mission is "to build relationships with people in the surrounding neighborhoods by loving people, so that they might come to a saving knowledge of Jesus and live transformed lives." Please do not make out the check to your church. Instead, tax deductible checks are to be made payable to *Overflow Café Ministries*. Add Shane Walker's name to the memo line if you wish to direct your gift to his support. One more thing: We'll be having lunch on Tuesday at 11:30, my treat, to hear more and to see for ourselves what goes on and to taste the delicious food and really, really good coffee. If you are interested in joining us, please let Nan know so we can reserve a seat for you.

Making a sacrificial offering of our time, talent, and/or treasure fits right in with the season of Lent. What is Lent, and how do we observe this most somber, introspective season of the church year? Beginning on Ash Wednesday, Lent is a 40-day period of prayer and reflection observed by many Christians as they prepare to celebrate Easter. Sundays are not included in the count of 40 days, because every Sunday recalls Jesus' resurrection. During Lent, we have opportunities to deepen our faith, repent of our sins, focus on spiritual growth, and serve others in Jesus' name.

Let's also take a moment to consider the origins of Lent. The word comes from an Old English word meaning "lengthen." That lengthening refers to days getting longer in the Northern Hemisphere in the Spring when we observe Lent and Easter. Although the Bible makes no mention of Lent, the season is rooted in the stories of Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness as he was tested by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). The season was likely celebrated in varying ways for many years until it was formalized by the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325.

On this Second Sunday in Lent we are looking at five verses that are actually two different stories. The first, known as "The Warning Against Herod," is found in verses 31-33. The second reports on "Jesus' Lament Over Jerusalem" (13:34-35).

In the first story, Pharisees come supposedly to warn Jesus that Herod is planning to kill him. Scholars continue to debate what is actually going on here. Are the Pharisees coming in good faith, because they perceive a threat? Or is this just theater when they seem to be standing up for Jesus? It's hard to say. If it is a bona fide threat, how do they know that? Although the Sadducees collaborated with Rome, the Pharisees did not. We know that Jesus

and the Pharisees have had their controversies, particularly about following the letter of the law. But we also know that Jesus has been a dinner guest in the homes of Pharisees, even though the conversation sometimes turned fractious. Moreover, we can't assume that this is an idle threat, because Herod Antipas actually had John the Baptist beheaded (Luke 9:9). On the other hand, in that same verse Herod asks, "but who is this about whom I hear such things? And he tried to see him." So, it's clear that Herod would like to talk with Jesus. Whether the meeting would be to satisfy Herod's curiosity or to imprison Jesus is not specified. The encounter could go either way.

Referring to Herod as a fox, a sly predator, Jesus cut to the chase and told the Pharisees that he is and will continue to do his work of healing people and casting out demons until he has finished. And remember, Jesus is not hiding; his works are done in public. Furthermore, Jesus' visitors are urged to tell Herod what he said. He has not yet arrived in Jerusalem, though he left Galilee and started on his way toward the Holy City, according to Luke 9:51. At that time, he had "set his face to go to Jerusalem," apparently knowing full well what awaited him there. Yet, Jesus chooses his destination and timetable, not Herod. Jesus emphasizes that it's impossible "for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem" (9:34).

Notice that the second part of today's reading is linked to the first by the word "Jerusalem." There's also another interesting link. In the first story, Herod is referred to as a fox; in the second, Jesus is compared to a mother hen. While I admit to having no firsthand knowledge of chickens, I understand that the hens can be brave and make sacrifices to keep their vulnerable chicks safe. Come to think of it, like the hens, Jesus is also brave and resolved to do what he needs to do to fulfill his God-given mission.

There may be some relationship between Herod as a fox and Jesus as a hen in the phrase "don't let the fox guard the hen house," which comes from an ancient Roman phrase. When we use that idiom, we mean that we don't want to put someone in charge of something who will harm, destroy, or exploit it. The fox would certainly be looking for a tasty meal! But we know that even if that connection was implied in these few verses, Jesus has the resolve and moral courage to stand up to the crafty Herod and not let himself or those he tenderly watches over be devoured.

As we get into verse 34, we are reminded that Jerusalem is the city where God's prophets are killed. Well, at least two of them were: Zechariah and Isaiah. Many other prophets were martyred, but not in Jerusalem. Yet, Jesus knows that he will face his own death in Jerusalem.

In contrast to the stones that killed the prophets, we find Jesus wanting to nestle us like a hen with a brood of chicks under her wing. But he isn't able to do this, because the people are not willing to allow him to do so. He tells his listeners, "you will not see me again until the time comes when you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" (9:35). These words are familiar to us as they are shouted by the crowd welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday. They praised God saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord" (19:38).

Today, we again find ourselves dealing with a situation that cannot be repeated in our own lives. So what can we take from it? How can we respond to it?

To answer these questions, I keep coming back to Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry's commentary in *Feasting on the Word* (Year C, Vol. 2, page 71) where he writes:

> For Jesus, God's passionate dream, and bold determination is to gather

God's human children closer and closer in God's embrace and love. That mission and commitment is at the center of Jesus' work. Like a mother hen, God seeks to draw, embrace, include, and welcome God's children into the family of humanity that God has intended from the dawn of Eden itself.

Doesn't this sound like something that each of Jesus' followers, including us, could do? We can welcome and include all of God's children into the family of humanity and, more specifically, the family as it exists here in our church. Loving and welcoming other people doesn't require any special skills, money, or degrees. You don't have to have a solo voice to lead the singing. You don't need to be able to preach like Peter. You don't even have to be willing to go on long missionary journeys as Paul did. No, you just have to be open to people, to invite them in, to hear their stories, to cry with them when they hurt, and laugh with them when they are experiencing great joy. I think these are actions we can all take. And I also believe we can learn how to be hospitable and welcoming, even if we consider ourselves shy or perhaps unwilling to get to know someone who is in somehow different from the way we perceive ourselves. When we can reach out to others in a warm, winsome way, we can overcome the immature behaviors of cliques who only care for their own. We no longer need to be first, or best, or bravest, or richest, or most brilliant. Instead, we can be faithful disciples of Jesus. So, one message we can take home his week is that we are to love and care for others just as God does.

Another take home message that we can ponder during Lent is this: I am not in charge. Herod had the idea that he was running the show. And certainly as the face of the Roman Empire in the Holy Land, he did wield tremendous power. But our God is far more powerful than any earthly ruler. Jesus wasn't worried about Herod or his threats. Jesus already knew that his mission would end with his death in Jerusalem on a Roman cross. Okay, we don't know what's just around the corner, much less how we might die..or when. But if we are willing to place our trust in Jesus, does that knowledge really make much difference? We can be about our mission, fulfilling God's calling on our lives as individuals and as the church, no matter what that might be, so as to bring praise, honor, and glory to God.

Piggybacking on the idea that I am not in charge is the reality that we can thwart God's best plans and greatest intentions for us. For me, the end of verse 34 Is the most important of the five verses in today's reading. Speaking about Jerusalem, Jesus said: "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" Jesus wants to shelter his followers under his protective wing, but they—we—don't want him to do that. You were "not willing" or "unwilling" according to many translations. But the New Jerusalem Bible is much more emphatic: "you refused!" Wait a minute here. Deciding not to do something because, well, I just don't want or desire to do it is one thing. But if the Greek word also means "refused," that's quite another. Lent is a particularly good time to look at my life and ask questions such as:

1. What is God calling me to do at this point in my life?
2. Am I serving God in the ways that he calls me to serve? If not, why not?
3. Am I so focused on the things of this world that I set aside the spiritual disciplines that can keep me cozily nestled under Jesus' wing—regular practices like Bible study, prayer, and worship?
4. Am I unable to let go of any fear and anxiety that keeps me from freely following

Jesus and doing his will?

5. Do I refuse to let Jesus care for me because I feel totally self-reliant?

If we are causing Jesus grief because of our refusal to say yes to him, what steps can we take to change that? Here are some ideas. Start small. Moses may have undertaken the task of leading the Jewish slaves out of Egypt, but most of us aren't ready for such a huge assignment. There are, however, little things we can do. Can you, for example, plan to attend church every Sunday during Lent, or offer a prayer each day during this season?

Let go of your need to be in control of all things at all times. Once you surrender control, God will lead you. But you have to be willing to trust that God is looking out for your best interests. You also have to recognize that God's time is not our time. Perhaps you, as I, have been very eager for an answer to prayer that didn't come on your timetable. I've found that, in retrospect, God's timing and ultimate answer were much better than mine, but I had to let go of my grip on my time and my desired answer to experience that.

Third, see if you can figure out why you do not want to surrender control of your life to God. What's holding you back?

Let's turn this discussion from us as individuals to us as a body of believers, the church. We're all aware that many people have turned aside from the institutional church for a variety of reasons. But what if, together as the Choptank Charge, we could look out for the common good and show naysayers that trusting in Jesus really is the best way to live? I think our churches are already known for their warm hospitality as visitors come, find God among us, and decide to stay. And although we've contributed to numerous missions, we're really getting on board with hands-on work and serious commitments at the Overflow Café. We're showing with our time, treasure, and talent that we are beloved members of the household of God and that we are cordially inviting others to join us. What good news is that!

Love, Nan