

## Second Sunday in Lent: February 27/28, 2010

### *The Longing God*

Luke 13:31-35

Did you give up something for Lent? Many do as a tangible reminder of all that Jesus gave up to accomplish our salvation. I have heard of people giving up caffeine, soda, even (gulp!) chocolate. If you are one of those people, I'm guessing by now, ten days into Lent, that you are having a bit of craving for those indulgences that you have denied yourself. To crave something is an immediate, visceral desire, something that you would almost beg for. *I've felt that way some mornings as I stumble around the house for a cup of coffee!* In contrast to the immediate desire of craving is the—larger in scope and longer in perspective—desire of longing. You long for happier days, healthier lives, peace of earth. If you are young you long for a fulfilling education and career, a perfect spouse, a place to call home. In midlife you long for stability in your job, for your children to be shielded from danger, and for their eventual independence. Later in life you long to leave a positive imprint upon the world and you long for the still waters of God's good pasture. We long for these things because they are good and because we do not presently possess them. We simply don't have the resources to make them happen. And so we wait. *Did you know that the Almighty God who possesses all resources also longs for outcomes? Can God make a stone so large that he cannot move it?* We ponder this thought as today we discover *The Longing God*.

You know the story well. Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching the people about the Kingdom of God. "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door," he teaches just prior to our text. Jesus will identify himself as that door and assert unequivocally, "No one comes to the Father except through me." "Many will try to enter," he continues, "and will not be able to." Why? Because they would chose some other door to enter. You know these doors. They are legion. They are the gods of these present evil age, be they self-indulgence or entitlement mentality, nationalism or anti-church sentiment, even the more subtle humanitarianism or "spirituality". "I don't know you or where you come from," replies the owner of the house with doors. How does Jesus, the owner of the house, react to such hard judgment upon the wayward willfulness of man? Listen closely that you might understand the heart of God. *"O 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, but you were not willing!* Jesus longs to gather the wayward children of his creation. He does everything in his power to make this happen. The unfolding drama of the passion narrative will demonstrate how much he will do and how far he will go. Yet, for so many, *they are not willing*. Jesus, the Word who spoke all things into existence, encounters the stone of man's willfulness. He wonders at such obstinance and longs for reconciliation. *Is there nothing he can do to gather his children under his wings?* How did it come to this, that Jerusalem, the city of the most High God, kills the prophets and stones those sent to her?

It wasn't that way in the beginning. God does good work and creates a world of infinite beauty and unlimited possibilities. *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good*. He bequeathed such beauty to mankind with this blessing: *Be fruitful and multiply*. Everything to gain. Nothing to lose. God was with them. Pretty good company. Long after everything changes when man exerts his willfulness—*I would be like God knowing good and evil*—we hear echoes of this goodness and God's invitation to join him. Moses says to his father-in-law: "Come with us and we will treat you well, for the LORD has promised good things to Israel." "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters," declares God; "You who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." It is a gracious invitation and a remarkable promise. It would seem that God made us an offer that we couldn't refuse.

Never underestimate the temptation to sin and the power of perversion. Temptation comes to us in many shades of light and is always desirable. What was true for Adam and Eve is true for us. Internet gambling will generate \$42 billion in tax revenues over ten years. Internet pornography must be protected to protect free speech. The definition of marriage must be expanded in order to be non-discriminatory. Many shades of light and always desirable. God responds by sending his prophets, that we might repent of our sin and return to God. "Again and again I sent all my servants the prophets to you," says our God. "They said, 'Each of you must turn from your wicked ways and reform your actions; do not follow other gods to serve them. Then you will live in the land I have given to you and your fathers.'" *But you have not paid attention or listened to me*" (Jer. 35:15). "As surely as I live I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Eze.33:11).

*Why will you die?* God holds out to us the path of life, and we choose death. He offers eternal treasure, and we chase after momentary pleasure. He gives life true meaning, and we do our best to escape reality and abandon anything meaningful. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. Why will you die?* In this lament, see the heart of Jesus, *the Longing God*. He knows your sordid past and your conflicted present. He is not put off by how often we have chosen the world over him. There is no sin too great that his love is not greater still. "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering." God knows your willful disobedience and he knows the misery it has caused. And he is concerned about your suffering. *How I long to gather you children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings*. Never, not for a moment, has God not longed for you. From the moment you were born. From the farthest you have wandered. From the depth of your despair. From the greatest weight you have carried. God has longed for you. That you be restored. That you would know his loving embrace. That you would rest in him. That you would experience abiding peace and joy.

"Who is a God like you," declares Micah the prophet, "who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy" (Micah 7:18). Jesus, *the Longing God*, who stretches out his arms over Jerusalem, is Jesus, the reconciling God, who stretches out his arms for them to be fastened down. He is lifted high for all to see the glory of God. He is brought low by the weight of our sin which crushes the life from his body. He is placed beneath the earth in a borrowed grave, but will soon spring forth to life, never to die again. *Who is a God like you?* "Come now, let us reason together," says Jesus. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." Who wants a new start? To wipe clean the slate. To run anti-virus software on the record of your life. To be given a fresh start and the promise of a new day. That is what Jesus offers you in the forgiven of sins. You are "white like snow" in God's eyes. It's what you need. It's what he longs for.

Can God make a stone so large that he cannot move it? It's a fanciful debate without a productive outcome. Better to consider outcomes that are rooted in fact. "Go tell that fox, Herod," says Jesus, "I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal." *His goal?* Sin paid. The tomb empty. Heaven open. And him gathering his children. As a hen her chicks. He would welcome you. All because He is *the Longing God*. Amen