

Grace and peace are your dear friends, from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

My dear friends, you are the faithful, the compassionate, the caring, and the generous souls who come to worship your Lord and Saviour each Sunday. Together with one another, we lift our humble, contrite, and sincere praise to the Almighty God of all heaven and earth. We hear the stories, narratives, and living Word of Holy Scripture and we are indeed; fed with the bread of life. What each of you take away from a corporate hour with your Lord is as unique as our relationship with our Lord. Each of you will hear the Spirit talking to you, as I pray, that the Spirit guides my words so our good and gracious God is glorified, as He is worthy. Most worthy!

The heart of God smiles and finds great comfort with you here; you are His chosen – we all are my friends. Our Gospel text appears to offer little comfort for anyone. One of the first elements to recognize in this text is ‘just how alone Jesus is.’ It is true; Jesus has his disciples. Peter confesses his love that turns into a denial when encountered with the face of fear. Jesus has a multitude of people who want to be healed, cured, and restored...but at the end of the, who does Jesus go to?

The gospel text today reveals the loneliness that Jesus must face each day and records an account where the Pharisees, (the very people God trusted, trained, and ordained to Shepherd His people) tell Jesus to leave Jerusalem because Herod wants to kill him. Today’s text is the account where people ask the Lord of Life to leave their presence, their town, their very life. Truth be known, the Pharisees want to kill him as well. Our Lord has a death sentence hanging over him, a terminal condition or situation, a limited time to live.

My friends, Jesus is going to die and what does he do about it? Jesus is going to do exactly what He came among us to do: to live, to love, to reveal God’s love for us by dying to live. As Jesus hears the words of the Pharisees, He reminds them that there is still work to be done and good work at that; work that is beneficial to society and to the kingdom. Jesus, regardless of a death threat, is going to continue to heal, cure, cast out demons, and care for human life. You see my friends, Jesus is going to continue to do what God commissioned the Pharisees to do...the same people who abandoned their authority, their Lord, and their people.

God comes back to the very people who abandoned Him...and again, they send Him away.

Now, do not surmise that the exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees is pleasant. It is truthful, but stinging and harsh at the same time. Jesus is not welcomed in Jerusalem as pointed out by the Pharisees, to which he replies, I take my leave of you and your house; ”you will not see me again until the time comes when you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Jesus’s prophetic words here might be cryptic to the Pharisee, but to us; God has granted the faith and understanding to know and accept that the words, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” will be declared in a few weeks at Jesus’s triumphant entry back to Jerusalem. Jesus leaves Jerusalem in the text today only to return as He faces His death.

The cover of your bulletin presents an image to what Jesus is feeling and hoping for with His beloved and chosen people; “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” The heart of God is speaking to Israel and the intention of bringing them together as One is revealed. But my friends, they cast Him out, denied Him a welcome; closed their doors, hearts, and minds to the very God who delivered them.

Israel was chosen, which is why God must be just and righteous in His treatment, words, and actions with them. You see, it was Israel that God chose to bring forth the salvation of the world; a prophecy that must,

will, and certainly be fulfilled. God desires Israel to participate in the plan, except they ‘opt- out’ and overlook the fulfillment of years of prophecy, promise, and hope. To Israel was given every grace, mercy, and miracle for the sake of welcoming salvation into the world. And Israel alone will not see the measure of God’s gift in Jesus Christ.

What is the message for us today? This is a difficult text to preach to people in church because; you are after all the faithful who come to hear what our good and gracious Lord is saying to us. But the truth my friends in that God (Jesus) are still not welcomed in many lives today. I pray you remember the words of today’s sermon in two weeks, because it might just change your image of what God is doing in the world and in our lives today.

The message for us today is: where is God welcomed and when? We gather each week regardless of our conditions, health, and financial prosperity because our Lord is worthy of our praise. Unfortunately, way too many people will turn and seek the Lord when their world, life, and hope fail them. A sad fact to this is the church attendance after 9-11 increased dramatically; but, when recovery and hope was restored, the welcome, praise, and worship slowly decreased to levels LOWER than before the event.

God desires to gather us all into the One Body of Christ, but will do so when we welcome Him. God desires that we all ‘know’ that we are His children. When all is going well in our lives today, when prosperity and blessings abound; is our thanks, worship, and praise to the Almighty lifted? Is Christ welcomed in times of great happiness? Our Lord declares that if we do not welcome Him now, He will still wait patiently for His name to be called out when we believe that we really need Him.

However, our Lord is not going to ‘take His leave of us’ or walk away...not this time; not ever. God left the tribe of Levi in charge of the Law and the priestly duties to care for the spiritual needs of His chosen people. The authority granted to them became corrupted and self-absorbed to the point where their authority simply lifted those ‘who were commissioned’ instead of lifting up those who were to be ‘served and cared for’.

God is not going to repeat this; God is going to replace their authority with His own. God is not about to trust the welfare of human life to us; God is going to take full responsibility for each and every life He brought into this creation; each and every life that He knew before we were born.

So, now that we know that our Lord is not going to leave (even when we fail to welcome Him), what’s next? We share the Good News, we witness to the events of our Lord, and we proceed in faith where God is revealing a welcome. My dear friends in Christ, it is not our work alone, but God work that we participate in for the sake of all people begin gathered together into the One Body of Christ...just as our Lord declared.

The Pharisee’s tell Jesus that Herod want to kill him; Jesus is going to die. Remember my friends, Jesus is fully human and fully divine and the human life will be put to death. Likewise, our mortal life is finite and we too shall all return to the dust of the earth. Ash Wednesday begins our Lenten season – 40 days of reflection – with the words, “from dust you came and to dust you shall return.”

Jesus is going to die; what does He do? Jesus comes to complete what God declared He would do. In other words, Jesus is ‘dying to live’; a model for our life as well. Jesus changed how we live so we no longer ‘live to die’ even though receiving news of a diagnosis, crisis, or other life-limiting report, may encourage us to create our personal ‘bucket list’. Like Christ, we also die to live and continue to faithfully service until our rest is won.

Faithful people of God, may together we share the peace that passes all understanding to everyone, so all might know the love of God who keeps our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ, our Lord; Amen.