

Under God's Wings

(Sermon by Rev. John Dieterly, February 28, 2010)

Philippians 3:17 – 4:1 ¹⁷Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. ^{4:1}Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Luke 13:31-35³¹At 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, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of 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.’”

On the surface, the visit from the Pharisees seems out of character. Didn't Jesus regularly chastise the Pharisees for their “holier than thou” attitudes, and for their strict, oppressive application of God's laws? And didn't the Pharisees join the Scribes and Temple leaders in plotting to kill Jesus? So why would they come and warn Jesus to flee from Herod, “who wanted to kill him?”

Their past behavior certainly indicated their hostility toward Jesus. Luke tells us plainly in chapter 11, that “**the Pharisees began to be very hostile toward him**” so it seems rather strange that the Pharisees would try to protect Jesus from Herod. Furthermore, at this point, we might think that Herod did **not** want to kill Jesus. In Luke, chapter 23, we read that Herod had wanted to meet Jesus for some time, he was curious; he wanted to see Jesus perform some miracles. So it is hard to believe that the Pharisees were trying to protect Jesus. Some Biblical scholars suggest that they were being devious. Maybe they were just trying to get Jesus to go away because they wanted him out of the picture. That could be it – it seems to fit better with their past behavior.

You see, this is how we always think. Past behavior patterns are indications of present and even future behavior because we are linear thinkers. Modern science depends on the predictability of this kind of linear thinking. If a blood test reveals high cholesterol, the doctor will tell you that you are in danger of heart disease and you will need to take medicine to lower your cholesterol or you will suffer a heart attack. If your behavior in the past has brought you this problem today, you are going to have to change your lifestyle, or you may not have many tomorrows.

Most of the time, this is how it works. But every now and then it doesn't. The doctor might say that, considering the symptoms, the size of the tumor, the blood tests, that the patient has only weeks, or days, or hours to live. But then the patient lives long past what the doctor has predicted. That does not necessarily mean that the doctor has made a mistake. Based on his experiences, and the experiences of many doctors, if these are the signs, this is the predictability of the disease.

But we also know that life is far more complex. There is something more in our Gospel lesson than probability and linear thinking.

In one sense, what the Pharisees had to say to Jesus was true. Jerusalem was trouble for Jesus. If he insisted going there, especially this year, especially this time of year, especially with all the things Jesus had said and done already, he just had to **know** where this was leading, what the future held for him – linear thinking.

But instead of turning back, he went on toward Jerusalem. And instead of being afraid, which is what we might expect, he wept for Jerusalem. If you were going into a city where you knew the people were going to kill

you, would you keep going, would you have compassion for the people, would you weep for that city? I don't think so.

But Jesus knew that the events of today and tomorrow would be so much different from the third day, not the third day from his conversation with the Pharisees, but the third day from his death. The third day that Jesus was talking about would be a sharp break from linear thinking.

When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he was in a pickle almost as bad as Jesus was in the Gospel lesson. Paul was in jail, hounded by the Jews, persecuted by the Romans, in real danger for his life. If he was going to keep on going the way he was going, speaking out so boldly, that could only lead him into deeper trouble, perhaps even death, following in the very footsteps of his Lord Jesus. And yet, he looks forward to the transformation of this "body of humiliation" into the "body of his glory." You see, Paul was not thinking in a linear way. He knew that the third day, as Jesus described it, or eternity as we might call it, was not a continuation of how things were yesterday, today, or even tomorrow.

I am convinced this is why Jesus wept for Jerusalem. They failed to see the future that God had intended for them. They could only think in terms of tomorrow being like today, or maybe more of it. But on the third day, the third day after Jesus' crucifixion, God would intervene and introduce a whole new future, a glorious future, a future with God. And all are invited into this future glory, this glorious "third day."

This is the meaning of Jesus parable of the hen and chicks. God would gather in all people, bring them into his family, into fellowship with him and one another. The image of a hen protecting its chicks is a good one. Those chicken wings may not be very good for flying, but they are excellent protection for the chicks. When danger approaches, the mother hen clucks, spreads her wings and her chicks run under them for cover. And if you ever try to snatch those chicks from under the mother hen you will learn just how good that protection is!

A cute little poem from the Canadian Sunday School Mission sums this up nicely:

There's a queer little house that stands in the sun.
When the mother calls, the children all run,
And under the roof it is cozy and warm,
Though the cold winds may whistle and bluster and storm,
This queer little house has no windows or doors,
The roof has no chimney, the rooms have no floors.
No fireplace, no furnace, no stove can you see,
Yet the children are cozy and warm as can be.

We are God's children. God wants to take us under his wing, to gather us together, to protect us, to keep us cozy and warm, in God's house. But we refuse. And by refusing, we lose so much. Because we refuse to be gathered, we refuse to listen to God, we are too busy doing our own thing, working so hard so that tomorrow can be like today, which is like yesterday, only more of it. But what will we do when the third day comes, God's third day, the day when God raises us up to step into eternity, as God raised Jesus on the third day? On that third day, will you be familiar with God's word? Will you be familiar with the fellowship of God, and the fellowship of God's family?

Listen to God calling you now, to come under the protection of his wing. Answer God's call, and reach out to bring others under God's protection. Respond to God's call. Gather under God's wing, and God will bring you to a glorious day that will be vastly different from the struggles of today.