

## ***Letting Go***

Luke 13: 31 – 35

February 28, 2010

### I. Introduction

- A. A few years ago, there was a song that became popular for a while
  - 1. Even if you didn't hear it, I'm sure you know the words—
    - a. "Don't worry, be happy"
- A. I actually liked the song the first dozen or so times that I heard it
  - 1. It seemed like such a simple, cheerful way of looking at life
    - a. But then I got really sick and tired of hearing it over and over and over
  - 2. And I realized that life is not always that simple or cheerful
    - a. And singing a catchy little tune, no matter how positive the message seems
      - (1) Is not going to make our troubles disappear or our pathways smooth
  - 3. There has to be something more to base our happiness on
    - a. Some good rationale for letting go of our worries and our fears
- A. Author Henry Van Dyke gives us this alternative –
  - 1. Happy and strong and brave shall we be
    - a. Able to endure all things, and to do all things
  - 2. If we believe that every day, every hour
    - a. Every moment of our life is in God's hands.
- A. It must have been a similar motto that Jesus lived by in his earthly life
  - 1. Not the care-free, happy-go-lucky, whatever will be, will be sort of philosophy
- A. Rather, a firm belief that God is in control, of the world and of my life
  - 1. So that I can move forward with confidence
    - a. Even when the way ahead looks dark and foreboding
      - (1) And even when we know that danger and death may be nearby
- A. The Psalmist, David, wrote about it in much the same way in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm
  - 1. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
    - a. I will fear no evil, the rod and staff are a comfort to me
      - (1) So long as I know that God, the loving shepherd, is with me
  - 2. Do you suppose that Jesus knew the words to that Psalm
- A. If our life is in God's hands, then we don't need to hold on so tightly
  - 1. Our future is secure, even when it may seem out of our control

- A. And we can “let go” – of our doubts, our fears, our feelings of insecurity
  - 1. Because we are “holding on” to a God who loves us and cares about us
    - a. And even more, because we trust that God is holding on to us
- II. As I mentioned to someone this week, I don’t remember preaching from this text before
  - A. And I can’t recall hearing a sermon preached from this text either
    - 1. The second part of these verses is similar to verses found in Matthew 23
      - a. But the first part sounds almost like a riddle
  - A. As I mentioned last Sunday, there is a point in Luke’s gospel
    - 1. When Jesus sets his sights on going to Jerusalem
      - a. A journey that would ultimately take him to his death on a cross
    - 2. But this is not a quick trip, Jesus continues to go from village to village
      - a. Teaching about the kingdom of heaven, and healing all manner of diseases
  - A. Our text seems to be an intrusion, or interruption in that daily ministry
    - 1. When some men of the religious sect known as the Pharisees
      - a. Come to Jesus with an urgent message –
        - (1) Get out of here, King Herod is looking for you and wants to kill you
    - 2. This brings up a couple of questions in my mind
  - A. Why were these Pharisees warning Jesus about Herod threatening his life
    - 1. When most of the time, it seemed like they wanted to get rid of him, too
  - A. And Jesus’ response, depending on your translation, seems to be a coded message
    - 1. Today, tomorrow, and the next day I am doing my work
      - a. After three days, I will be finished
    - 2. Then I will come to Jerusalem, the city where prophets are killed
      - a. What did all of that mean?
  - A. There could be several ways of understanding the Pharisees’ warning
    - 1. The most obvious is that they were genuinely concerned about Jesus
      - a. It can be easy for us to lump all the Pharisees together
        - (1) As we hear about them in various gospel accounts
      - b. And assume that when some of them oppose Jesus’ teaching
        - (1) It means that all of them were proud, arrogant, and didn’t like Jesus
    - 2. That’s obviously not the case, because we read of certain instances
      - a. During Jesus’ ministry that he was befriended by men who were Pharisees
        - (1) And some who were sincerely interested in what he had to say

3. It is not until Jesus reaches the city of Jerusalem that we begin to hear of plots
  - a. By the Jewish religious leaders, some of whom were likely Pharisees
    - (1) Wanting to have Jesus put to death because they felt threatened
      - (a) By his teaching and by his popularity with the crowds of people
- A. Or it might be that they were concerned for their own safety
  1. If Herod was truly wanting to kill Jesus, some of them might well be caught up
    - a. In the violence and bloodshed along with Jesus and his disciples
  2. Herod was known to be totally ruthless when it came to defending his throne
    - a. And anyone who attracted the kind of crowds that Jesus did
      - (1) Could very well have been seen as a possible insurrectionist
    - b. There seems to have been some of that thinking by the Roman authorities
      - (1) When Jesus was brought to trial before Pilate and Herod
- A. Or it might be possible, as some have suggested about Judas Iscariot
  1. That these Pharisees were motivated to give Jesus this warning
    - a. In the hope that it would force Jesus into a showdown with Herod
  2. If Jesus could command supernatural powers to do amazing miracles
    - a. Then maybe he could bring about the deliverance from the Roman authorities
      - (1) That they believed would happen when the Messiah came
- A. In any case, don't you have to almost chuckle at the language Jesus uses
  1. In response to the Pharisees' warning about Herod –
    - a. Go, and tell that fox for me...
  2. Now I don't think Jesus was being disrespectful of Herod's authority here
    - a. Not the way that we often hear a total lack of respect
      - (1) For persons in positions of authority today
  3. And Herod was not known for his shrewdness or craftiness
    - a. The characteristics we might think of when Jesus likens him to a fox
- A. I wonder if Jesus may be simply referring to the predatory nature of a fox
  1. When you link that together with his following words
    - a. About the desire to shelter the people of Jerusalem "as a hen gathers her chicks"
      - (1) We get the image of Herod being the fox in the chicken house, so to speak
  2. I'm sure that's not the only danger Jesus was talking about here
    - a. But it makes me realize how it must have made Jesus feel so sad
      - (1) To see his people living under the oppression of the Roman Empire

- b. How he longed for them to turn back to God for their protection
      - (1) As well as their spiritual freedom and redemption
- A. And he seems not the least bit daunted by Herod's evil intentions on his life
  - 1. Go tell that fox that I am too busy to concern myself about his threats
    - a. But notice that he explicitly calls attention to what he is doing
      - (1) Tell him that I am busy casting out demons and curing diseases
- A. If Herod was worried that Jesus was a potential rival for his throne
  - 1. The image of an itinerant teacher performing acts of healing
    - a. Was not exactly the type of rebellious campaign mounted by most of the men
      - (1) Who were trying to lead an uprising against the hated Romans
- A. At the same time, Jesus seems to be acknowledging the fact
  - 1. That his earthly life and ministry would come to an end
    - a. Not in a literal three days time, but in God's timing
  - 2. And until that time, his focus would not be on protecting his life
    - a. But in giving his life for the people he came to serve
- A. And it was not literally impossible for his life to be taken outside of Jerusalem
  - 1. In fact, the hill where he would be put to death was outside of the city walls
- A. Rather, Jesus seems to be pointing to the fact that his greatest danger
  - 1. Came not from the political powers who thought they were in control
- A. Jesus' death would instead come about for the same reason
  - 1. That many of the prophets of God had been killed before him
    - a. The rebellious nature of human pride rejecting a loving God
  - 2. Jerusalem, with its high protective walls, its grand temple and palace
    - a. Was the central focus of wealth and power that signified
      - (1) Israel's lust for fame, fortune and security
        - (a) And her rejection of the true blessings that God offered
- A. No wonder, then, that Jesus' heart appears to be near the breaking point
  - 1. As he calls out to this ancient city Jerusalem –
    - a. How often have I desired to gather your children together
      - (1) But you were not willing
- A. The illustration of a hen gathering her chicks under her wings is a powerful one
  - 1. We kept a few chickens for their eggs when I was a kid growing up
    - a. But I was never around hens with chicks very much

2. However, I can picture in my mind a mother hen, fluffing out her feathers
    - a. To make room for her offspring under the protection of her wings
  - A. It gives me a warm and cozy feeling, until I remember
    1. That the hen is putting herself in a very vulnerable position
      - a. To any danger that might be threatening the safety of her chicks
    2. We sometimes talk about the normal human response to danger
      - a. In terms of “fight or flight”
    3. I don’t know if chickens have the same natural instinct
      - a. But if they do, the hen is doing something very unnatural
        - (1) When it gathers her chicks underneath her
    4. In that position, she can not put up much of a fight if needed
      - a. And she gives up any possibility of running away from danger, too
  - A. When you look at it from that perspective, it puts Jesus’ desire in a whole new light
    1. With all the power and might of eternal God at his disposal
      - a. He is willing to give it all up in order to protect his children from harm
    2. No, it wasn’t just the danger posed by the Romans that Jesus was thinking of
      - a. When he offered a place of refuge and safety
    3. The real danger in turning away from God’s love and forgiveness
      - a. Is that even if we could gain the whole world, we would lose our soul
        - (1) The purpose that we were created for, the relationship with God
          - (a) That begins in this life and continues on through eternity
  - A. Jesus made himself vulnerable, he did not turn away from suffering and death
    1. So that we could find that place of safety and refuge
      - a. And so often, just like the city of Jerusalem and its people
        - (1) We are not willing to allow it
- III. We have said that our theme for this Lenten season is “Holding on, and Letting go”
- A. It seems to me that we have at least two applications of that theme
    1. In this scripture text that we are looking at today
  - A. First, we see the example of Jesus in letting go of worry about the things of this life
    1. We may never face the fear of someone actually seeking to kill us
      - a. But we can find ourselves distracted by so many things
    2. Worry about our financial situation, fear of an uncertain future
      - a. Concern for maintaining social status, threats to our physical health

- A. All of these things may be legitimate concerns in our lives at times
  - 1. But they should never become the dominating factor
- A. God has put us here for a reason and a purpose
  - 1. First and foremost, we are created to give God praise and honor
    - a. To love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength
      - (1) And to show love to our neighbors near and far
  - 2. When the concerns of life threaten to hold us back from that purpose
    - a. Then we need to learn how to let them go
      - (1) And trust that “Every moment of our life is in God's hands”.
    - b. Nothing can happen to us that is not under his control
- A. And second, we need to let go of the things that keep would us
  - 1. From being gathered under the shelter and protection of God’s care
- A. It seems so simple, we can see how foolish it was for the people of Israel
  - 1. The city of Jerusalem, to reject the love that Jesus offered
- A. And yet, how often do we let pride and our desire to be in control of our lives
  - 1. Keep us from entrusting everything into God’s hands
- A. Or, how often do we trust in the powers that we can see
  - 1. Rather than in the invisible power of God’s love
- A. How often does Jesus weep over our church, our home, our nation
  - 1. With the words – I long to gather you under my wings
    - a. But you are not willing
- A. May God grant us the grace to hold on to the promise of God’s protection and care
  - 1. And let go of our fear, and all of the things that get in the way
    - a. And hinder us from the life and purpose God has called us to
  - 2. So that we can walk with Jesus in this life, even to the cross
    - a. Because we know the resurrection is coming