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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
2/21/2016, The Second Sunday in Lent  
Luke 13:31-35

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My main text for this morning's sermon is our Lord's lament over Jerusalem. Jesus says this:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! (Luke 13:31-35, RSV)

It is said of a mother hen, that if fire breaks out in the barn, she will gather her chicks under her wings. And so it is that a charred hen is found, dead from the flames, but her chicks are okay under her wings.

This lament of Jesus for Jerusalem is one of the most tender and maternal expressions of love in the Bible. And when we stop to reckon with the idea that the One who laments in this fashion is the Maker of heaven and earth, “and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3), well, we can scarcely take it in. This is a lament that teems with hope for humanity, but also with heartbreak — heartbreak for such a good Lord who is going to die trying to save his people.

Let us linger with this lament of Jesus, exploring it under two headings. First, let us note the city being lamented. It is a glorious and holy city: Jerusalem. And second, let us admire the One who laments. He is our Lord Jesus.

We begin with the first subject. Who is this city being lamented? Why, it is Jerusalem, the holy city.

We New Yorkers, to our sorrow, have some feel for how jarring it is to imagine the suffering of a great town. Many of us were here on that awful day when the Twin Towers came down. We lamented for the lives lost and for the loved ones left in such grief. We lamented too for our city — that our town could be the object of such terror and destruction.

When Jesus laments for Jerusalem, he laments for an ancient and glorious town — a town beloved to its citizens, a town privileged above all others. Jerusalem is the “city of David.” Florence can boast of Michelangelo. Jerusalem can boast of David. Jesus was lamenting the ancient city that goes all the way back to this magnificent poet warrior king.

But the titles for Jerusalem soar above the connection with David. Jerusalem is also called “the holy city” (Nehemiah 11:1). It is the “faithful city” (Zechariah 8:3), the “perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth” (Lamentations 2:15). Indeed Jeremiah says that Jerusalem is destined to be the “the throne of the

LORD” (Jeremiah 3:17). He does not mean the “throne of Israel’s *king*,” but rather, something much higher: the throne of “the LORD,” the Maker of heaven and earth. Jerusalem is the home of the temple and so of the “holy of holies.” The very presence of God is in Jerusalem. He whom “the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain” (1 Kings 8:27) is willing to dwell in Jerusalem. How can such a city fall? How can Jesus lament for such a great and impressive town?

But Jesus does lament for this town. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together...” You can hear the sorrow in his words. They bring to mind the heartrending lament of David for his dear friend Jonathan, when David hears the news that Jonathan has been killed in battle:

<sup>17</sup>And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son... <sup>19</sup>The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! (2 Samuel 1:17-19, KJV)

Yes! The mighty can fall! Jerusalem faces a decision now. She must decide about Jesus. Once again, a prophet is being sent to Jerusalem. Indeed, *more* than a prophet is being sent to Jerusalem. The very Word of God, our Lord Jesus, is being sent to her. And Jesus laments, because he senses that the great city Jerusalem is going to reject and kill him.

The mighty can fall. And Jerusalem *does* fall. Within a generation of Jesus’s lament, the armies of Rome siege Jerusalem, sack it, and destroy the temple. The privileged can fall. Those decked out in the beautiful copes and chasubles of holiness can fall. Those decked out in the robes of royalty can fall. We can each fall.

That is why we should seek shelter in Jesus. More than the walls of the city, more than the glories of the past, more than our present honors and virtues, it is best of all for us to seek the shelter of Jesus. To be part of the Good Shepherd’s flock, to be a chick under his wings, and to be a disciple following along in his footsteps: such things are more important than anything else this world can offer. A humble walk with Jesus is better than any fortress or any army.

Jesus laments for Jerusalem because he understands that that town will reject him. Let us not cause Jesus to also lament for us. Let us not live in such a way that Jesus looking on will say of us, “You cannot stand. This manner of life — it will not stand.” You and I are like Jerusalem of old: we must make a decision about Jesus day by day. Perhaps such a decision will be forced on you or on me even this coming week. If we turn away from Jesus, he can only look on us with sorrow. Let us not be the occasion for our Lord’s lament.

I am convinced that the chief question in life for you and me is the question of Jesus. Life become busy. Life becomes chock full of preoccupations and passions. But what of Jesus? In the moment of crisis, when we must take a stand and decide what kind of men and women, boys and girls we are going to be, will we take our stand with Jesus, or will we walk away? Jesus laments Jerusalem because that

glorious and holy city will acclaim him with palm branches one moment, but taunt him with cries the next:

He saved others ; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. (Matthew 27:42, KJV)

The lesson of this first theme is that, no matter how learned or impressive we might otherwise be, we should try to be humble people who want nothing higher, really, than to walk with Jesus. Let all else be taken from us, but give us Jesus. Then there will little need for eternity to lament for us.

Second, let us admire the One who laments. I mean, our Lord Jesus. The striking thing about this passage could well be this: Jesus is not lamenting for himself, but for the town that will kill him.

If I were on a journey that I knew would end with my death, I would be sad for myself — not for those who will kill me. Jesus knew that he was not long for this world. Four chapters earlier he had told his disciples about it:

Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day. (Luke 9:22, KJV)

Now, Jesus looks upon the town that will slay him and laments, not for himself, but for that town.

Wondrous love, that the one being killed can look with sorrow on those who kill him! Jesus was still a young man, say, in his early thirties. Life is sweet for the young. Life is full of strength and promise, hopes and dreams. It has its forward momentum. If I were still young and knew that before long, I would die a terrible death on a cross, I would lament for myself. But Jesus laments for Jerusalem.

That is the great measure of his heart. He laments not for himself, but for those who reject and kill him.

The great wonder of this lament is that it is God who is grieving. It is God — Maker of heaven and earth, who cannot be contained in heaven or even the heavens of heaven — it is this God who sorrows for the town and for any of us who turn away from him.

Jesus would gather that town under his wings. He would let the fire in the barn burn him to death, but he would save his chicks, save his flock, save this town, save the whole world. If only this town were willing. But it is not willing, and so Jesus grieves. It is as if the chicks refuse to find protection in him. They face the flames on their own. They could find shelter under his wings, but they will not! And so Jerusalem will suffer. Jesus knows, fears it, and grieves for the suffering of the town that turns away from him.

Jesus grieves still for any town and for any person who turns away from him. It cannot be safe, he thinks to himself. It cannot be safe to walk away from the One

who is willing to die for us. The heart of Jesus is so large and so full of love for us, that he can only grieve if we depart from him and his ways.

So, let us not depart from him. Let us not be like wayward chicks who refuse to seek the shelter of Jesus when the fire breaks out in the barn. Let us not listen to the allures of this world, tempting us run hither and yon, everywhere except to the One who interposes his body over ours, to save us. This is humanity's mother hen. This is our maternal Lord who loves every person on the face of this earth, who can only grieve if we stray from him, and to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.