

Luke 13 ³¹ *At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, “Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.”*

³² *He replied, “Go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’”* ³³ *In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!*

³⁴ *“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, and you were not willing.”* ³⁵ *Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”*

Every so often we have a conversation with someone that maybe we don't know very well and they suddenly open up their hearts to us. We are given a glimpse into the longings of their heart. We feel enormously privileged, especially if it is someone we admire, and we feel a lot closer to that person.

In today's gospel passage, we are given an insight into the longing of Jesus' heart – a great longing and a deep sorrow or heart-ache, when he says: *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”*

Before we look at this more closely, let's look at the context first.

[Jesus is on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem, but it is a long meandering journey with many detours as Jesus seeks to reveal the kingdom of God through his teaching and his healing, to as many as possible.]

It might be surprising to us that some Pharisees take the trouble to warn Jesus that he is in danger from Herod. But there were some who were quite sympathetic to Jesus and they certainly would have hated Herod, or maybe they were sent by Herod to get him to move out of Herod's territory. Either way, Jesus is clearly not impressed. He refers contemptuously to Herod as a fox – a term for someone who is cunning, vicious and destructive, but also someone who is small, insignificant and unimpressive. Jesus will not be worried or hurried, diverted or directed by such a person. Jesus has his own agenda and his own time-table and that is the one planned for him by his heavenly Father, so he says: *I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem*

I must = it is necessary/required for me.

Jesus uses the prophetic, symbolic, language of “3 days”: *‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.* And Luke's readers would have understood that Jesus was also making an allusion to reaching his goal of resurrection when he rose again *on the 3rd day.* But rising from the dead means that first he must die and he says that must happen in Jerusalem.

This continued to be a great puzzle to the disciples: You can imagine them thinking *Why do you have to die? You are doing such wonderful things you are bringing about the kingdom of God: healing and casting out demons, drawing huge crowds and teaching them about the kingdom, changing people's lives. Why do you keep saying you have to die?*

Maybe they were also surprised at his description of Jerusalem; after all it was the holy city, the place of pilgrimage, the place of the Temple where God had his presence here on earth. Jesus knew however, it was also often filled with corruption, political intrigue, oppression, and sexual immorality, that the worship in the Temple had often been no more than lip-service. And when throughout Israel's long history, God's prophets had come and challenged the establishment, more often than not they had been ignored, reviled, persecuted and sometimes put to death.

Jesus has no doubt that his destiny as a messenger of God will be the same.

But more than that, his death was the very goal of his mission on earth. And so we come to those poignant words of Jesus: "*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, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.*"

What does this picture of a hen gathering her chicks under her wings mean? In the ancient world, where there was an open fire in every house and flammable materials all around, fires sweeping through buildings, towns and streets were a much more common experience.

If a fire sweeps through a farmyard and a mother hen is trapped and unable to escape with her chicks she will then gather them up under her wings for protection. There are many known instances of a dead mother hen being found after a fire, scorched and blackened and asphyxiated by the smoke and the fumes; and then live chicks popping out from under her wings, saved by the pockets of air trapped under her feathers.

The mother hen has quite literally given her life to save her offspring.

This is the picture that Jesus uses here. He knows that a conflagration is coming upon Jerusalem if they carry on their present course, a course which is not only rejecting Jesus, God's messenger and Messiah, but which some 40 years later will lead to violent revolution against the Romans provoking the utter destruction of Jerusalem with the most enormous and terrible loss of life. Jesus can see this all too clearly and these are his own people. He longs for them to put their trust in him, to seek shelter under his wings, for this is the only way they will be saved.

And this is not just true of the inhabitants of Jerusalem which would be completely flattened by the Romans, but of all mankind. In their arrogance and self-sufficiency, in their rejection of God as revealed in Jesus, the world is heading for certain destruction, individuals are heading for an eternity without God. Jesus know the only way people can be saved is by him bearing on the cross, the fire of God's judgement upon the world, and by people being persuaded to believe and trust in Jesus and to take shelter under his wings. Yes, the healing and teaching might help persuade them, but without him going to the cross and taking on his own shoulders the judgement they deserve, it would all be for nothing.

No wonder there is such a longing in Jesus' heart that the people of Jerusalem should come to him. No wonder there is such poignant sadness in those words *but you were not willing*.

And what is the longing of your heart? Do you have that same longing as Jesus that people should seek to come under his wing?

Bill Hybels' story of sorting through the mail and binning the postcard with the photos of 2 abducted children.

God: What – do you feel no emotion at all Bill? No.

Why not? Well, the bottom line is that they are not my children.

If they were, I would do anything to rescue them.

God, well those children are MY children and that's exactly how I feel.

In fact that's how I feel about any human being that has been abducted by the power, the culture, of this world from my family.

If only we can see people as Jesus sees them

If only we can truly enter into this passionate longing of Jesus' heart,

then maybe we will begin to do a bit more about it –

through our prayers, through our word and through our actions.

Prayer:

Oh Cholsey, Cholsey, you who ignore God's messengers and block out any thought of God, how often Jesus has longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings,

