

Luke 13:31-35

Imagine for a moment that everyone in heaven and in hell was to wear a name tag with a badge informing the one who reads it why he or she is there. What would be on that badge? People's opinions here will vary. They'll say that hell's badges will read: "I was a thief;" "I was an adulterer;" "I was a murderer;" and so on....and that the badges of those in heaven will say such things as: "I lived a pretty decent life;" "I loved God and my neighbor." This is how people in general see things. But this is not what God says.

Jesus sums it up pretty well in our text for today. In crying tears over Jerusalem, He says these revealing words: "*How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!*"

Jerusalem was, as He puts it, "*the city that killed the prophets and stoned those that were sent to it.*" But the badge that the people of Jerusalem would wear in hell is not: "I killed God's prophets;" or "I stoned those God sent to me." There is only one badge for everyone in hell whether they are from Jerusalem or not. It's one badge fits all, and it has written on it these three words: "I would not." How often would Jesus have gathered together these precious souls for whom He would die, but they would not.

That right there is the reason why people perish. "*I would gather you together under My wings,*" says Jesus, "*But you would not!*" Thieves, adulterers, murderers...can all be gathered. No sin prevents Jesus from gathering the sinner under His wings. No one perishes because they are too sinful; because they have done this sin or that sin. No one needs to go to hell. No one is destined to perish there. Jesus died for every sinner. He spread out His wings on the cross for all. And He wants to gather all sinners to Himself.

But we see Him weeping over Jerusalem, and He weeps over Augusta, and Washington, and Marthasville, and every place in between, because though He would gather together all sinners, so many refuse to be gathered.

That gathering is taking place right now, here in this place, for Jesus is here in Word and in Sacrament for the purpose of gathering you to Himself. He does not weep tears over you if you were simply awful last week; if you were unfaithful to your spouse; if you were unkind; if you cursed, dishonored your parents. Rather, He weeps tears of joy that you and I are here to repent of our sinfulness.

Jesus would not have gathered you here today if there was no hope for you. You are not outside of His mercy. You are one for whom He died. You are His brood, His children. He loves you. He desires, above all, to gather you under His wings.

He weeps over Jerusalem as a warning to us. They, too, were His brood, His children. He loved them, too. Of all people, they should have been the ones to welcome Jesus. Instead, they resisted Him. They refused to let Him gather them together.

You and I do not live in Jerusalem, but Jerusalem surely does live in us. Jesus would gather us to Himself, but again and again we refuse Him. “Not today, Jesus; I’m too busy. I have more important things to do than to be gathered to you...maybe next time.”

If this has been you in the past, let it not be you in the future. The mother hen does not force her brood to come under her wings. They come because she opens her wings to them. Jesus is gracious to all of you, but He does not force His grace on any of you. He invites you in mercy. He gathers you in love. He compels no one with the Law. He draws you as your mother Hen with pure Gospel.

Here is where He spreads His wings to you. Not out there...here. Here is where the baptized gather. Here is where “*we preach Christ Crucified.*” Here is where Christ Crucified comes to gather you to Himself through bread and wine in His Sacrament. It is the mark of those who are perishing to refuse to be gathered. “*You would not!*” are Jesus’ words to them with tears in His eyes.

But take care, you who faithfully gather here around Christ--the badge you will wear in heaven is not: “I came when Jesus opened His wings.” Oh no! It’s not what we do that gets us to heaven! If that’s our opinion, then we’ll never get there. In heaven, too, it’s one badge fits all: “Jesus gathered me to Himself.” That’s it. It’s not what we did; it’s what Jesus did for me. It’s not “O Lamb of God, I come, I come;” it’s this Lamb of God who draws sinners like me and gathers us to Himself.

In heaven Jesus will present you to His Father and say: “Father, I died for this precious child of Mine. This is My forgiven one - and He means you! I gathered him/her to Myself in the waters of Baptism. I gathered this precious child to Myself through the patient teaching of the catechism. I continued to gather this dear child under My wings through the hearing of My Word and through the reception of My body and blood at My Table. And now, Father, I have gathered this dear child of Mine to Myself in heaven.” And with great joy your Heavenly Father will welcome you as one whom Jesus has gathered to Himself.

Those who perish will receive no such welcome. They can say: “Jesus died for me, too,” for that is true. But for all eternity they will not know the joy of being gathered under Jesus’ wings, but only that they “*would not!*”

What is taking place here today is no small thing. This is a foretaste of what is to come. The gathering Jesus is doing here today leads to His gathering you into heaven. He gathers you now to preach His Word into you. He gathers you now to put His body and blood into you. He gathers you now to forgive you...and you are forgiven. He gathers you under His wings now, so that under His wings you will be gathered forever in heaven. Amen.