

The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

O Jerusalem! (The Fox and the Hen)

Luke 13.20ff

March 26, 2017

And again He said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? ²¹ "It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."

²² And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. ²³ And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there *just* a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, ²⁴ "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. ²⁵ "Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' ²⁶ "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; ²⁷ and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.' ²⁸ "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. ²⁹ "And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline *at the table* in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ "And behold, *some* are last who will be first and *some* are first who will be last."

³¹ Just at that time some Pharisees approached, saying to Him, "Go away, leave here, for Herod wants to kill You." ³² And He said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third *day* I reach My goal.' ³³ "Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next *day*; for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem. ³⁴ "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *the city* that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen *gathers* her brood under her wings, and you would not *have it!* ³⁵ "Behold, your house is left to you *desolate*; and I say to you, you will not see Me until *the time* comes when you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

We've been looking at the vast array of minor characters in the story of Jesus Christ and today we find a number of them at the end of Luke chapter 13.

Sometimes in novels or movies, the location or setting will function as a character...Think of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* where London and Paris (at the time of the French Revolution) serve as contrasting characters.

The movies of Woody Allen sometimes use New York City as a character... the musical, *Chicago* is another example and in today's passage, Jesus Christ addressed JERUSALEM as if that city was a person, a player in this "*Greatest Drama Ever Staged.*" (Dorothy Sayers)

This is part of a “Lament” (continued in chapter 19 on Palm Sunday... and He refers to that day in the last lines of this passage [Ps 118]). The way Jesus Christ speaks to this character, the city of Jerusalem, is both tender and severe and heart-rending: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!" (34)

The whole passage is full of feeling/intensity. And it draws our attention to a battle of wills... the will of the people, the will of God and Jesus Christ and the will of the leadership.

It exposes a little universal tendency in all of us... i.e. to divert attention from what really matters and lose ourselves in interesting minutiae... a kind of maneuver we use to shift the focus away from what really matters... (Doctor: your blood-sugar is high ...Patient: Really...how do you test for that?)

You’ve probably heard, the secret to life: “The main thing is the keep the main thing the main thing” and here Jesus Christ firmly and tenderly does just THAT. Let’s look at #1) Diversionary Tactics #2) War of the Wills and #3) A Fox in the Hen’s House

If Jesus Christ were IN THE FLESH...right here in this sanctuary... and YOU could ask Him any question you wanted, what would you ask?

For sure...some would want to know about life on other planets... other people would want to know things about their own lives...their future... the future of the world (Matt 24.36) ... even a big theological question (which religion or denomination is closest to the truth...) or other big mysteries (will the Dolphins EVER will a Super Bowl?)

And as Jesus Christ is marching on toward Jerusalem (this is Luke’s “Travel Narrative” starting in 9.51) and He’s been teaching His Main Thing – the Kingdom of God... and how God’s great plan is counterintuitive and NOT the way we THINK... It’s tiny like yeast mixed into a massive quantity of flour... and in time it permeates the whole batch and changes it (makes it rise and come to life): the Kingdom of God looks insignificant... like yeast/tiny mustard seed... but in time it’ll grow in a fantastic way... And in the end it’ll change everything... in a person’s life and eventually in all of creation... but it starts small and unnoticed.

And then someone pipes in, “So...will only a few people be saved?”

And it sounds like a common-sense question but the way the Teacher answers makes clear that it’s a tactic for avoiding the Main Thing: "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

And what Jesus Christ is saying is, “Don’t fixate on what is really God’s business or on future events or on what is other people’s business – INSTEAD – focus on God’s Reign in YOUR LIFE...in the NOW!

If you're alive... there’s a window of opportunity OPEN NOW ... a door...a narrow opening that is for YOU THE MAIN THING... In John CH 10 He’ll say, “I AM the Door...” So, come now AND THROUGH Me enter into the Party that is the Kingdom of God...NOW!”

“When your life is over...the door is closed... but NOW as you hear My voice”, says Jesus Christ, “the opportunity is open ... Don’t wait until it’s too late.”

Many presumptuous people will say, “Uh! Hello! It’s locked...let me in ...it’s ME... I’m Jewish (or for that matter, ‘I’m Presbyterian’) I AM YOUR KIND’A people and there’s obviously some mistake... the door to the party is locked and I OBVIOUSLY BELONG INSIDE.””

Jesus breaks through the diversionary tactics, the spiritual presumption of those ancient listeners who just KNEW they were guests of honor at God’s party because, “You know... I’m Jewish!”

And He’s telling them, “Those who WILL be included THEN are the ones who come to ME NOW...”

The Main THING is to come to Me...NOW! And to do that you have to let go of all smugness and conceit and self-satisfaction based on YOUR ABILITY to formulate interesting questions OR your ethnicity (“Hey, I’m genetically related to Abraham! I’m YOUR kind of people!”) and put away your feeling that “Hey, I was in church...I was a MEMBER! I heard the teaching of Jesus Christ!” AND INSTEAD COME TO ME NOW! – THAT’S THE MAIN THING!”

To those original hearers, Jesus Christ is only saying what John the Baptist already said, “(Don’t say)’We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.” (Luke 3.8) And now Jesus adds words taken from the Prophecy of Isaiah (43.5-6 et al), “I will turn Gentiles from the North, South, East and West into true children of Abraham... and they will recline at the table in the Kingdom of God... Abraham believed in ME (John 8.56)... and the True Children of Abraham who are admitted to the eternal party are like Abraham – they are believing in ME!”

“And behold, many are last who will be first and many are first who will be last.” See... you may be the MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED in your present community of people... because you're Jewish or because your parents raised you well or because you are well acquainted with My teaching – but many of these “most-likely-types” will be OUT... and many of the least likely types will be IN...because they came to Me...because I was the Door for them...and they knew they couldn’t get in on the basis of their deserving.

“Right NOW”, says Jesus, “NOT in some speculative, well-isn’t-that-interesting future...but RIGHT NOW, put off your “inspired” diversionary tactics and all your self-confidence...come out with your hands up... admit your failings and your desperate need...trust in Me – I AM THE NARROW DOOR...but I’m wide open NOW!”

And let me appeal to YOU today... WE too are prone to the same kind of diversionary tactics and spiritual overconfidence as the first hearers... Don’t plan to use the St. Andrews name when you get to the party (it won’t get you IN) and don’t plan to say, “Oh yeah! Jesus is just alright with ME...I went to Sunday School...grew up in a church that taught the Gospel...”

In fact ...forget about THEN...focus on the NOW... come to the Narrow Door NOW... the Main Thing!

Just then... some Pharisees came up saying, “Better get out’a here quick! Herod wants to kill you.”

And that introduces this WAR OF THE WILLS in vv.31ff (Point #2) – “Herod WANTS to kill you...”

And we don’t know WHY they’re saying that: do these Pharisees care about Jesus? We don’t know where they’re coming from (as we’d say) – which was the statement in vv 25 and 27 given to people who come to the Kingdom and are not admitted...

But whatever their motive...Herod Antipas was the Tetrarch (one of four governors) and ruled over the districts where Jesus Christ grew up and these Pharisees seem to think Jesus will be afraid of Herod but instead, Jesus says, “OK, Herod wants to kill Me but I WANT to stay the course...to do the WILL of My Father... I MUST journey on...conquering Canaan Land like Joshua” (His namesake) – this is the True Joshua (Yeshua) who conquers city after city with the sword from His mouth (Rev. 1.16) dispelling darkness/evil, healing and NEVER veering from His goal.

He “must” (BIG word in Luke’s version – see it in v. 33) – HE MUST GET TO JERUSALEM – why? Because He stands in a long line of Prophets killed by the religious establishment in Jerusalem...and HE IS THE END OF THE LINE... The Prophets spoke the Word of God – HE IS THE WORD OF GOD... and He goes to Jerusalem to die – that’s His “telos” – His purpose.

Maybe they meant well (we don’t know where they were coming from) but if they were trying to keep Him from dying... they only misunderstood the purpose of His coming, His “telos”, His goal... HIS WILL IS TO GET TO JERUSALEM and die.

The Pharisees WILL to spare Him... Herod wills to kill Him where He stands...the people WILL to enthrone Him... the disciples WILL Him to make them great... BUT HE WILL TO GET TO JERUSALEM for the great showdown – HE WILL TO take on the religious establishment and He will both overthrow them and He will accomplish what the priests and clergymen and

theologians could never do – HE WILL OFFER THE FINAL SACRIFICE and He will render the Temple forever obsolete.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her... Behold, your house is left to you desolate" He's speaking to the Temple officials and leaders and priests.

Through the centuries, you have rejected the Word of God... and now you will reject God Himself...and it has to happen at the Center of the World – the Axis Mundi – CENTER STAGE AT THE CENTER OF HISTORY.

"I MUST journey on..."

And then Jesus Christ...speaking as it were to the religious establishment of the City of God...speaking to all religion of all time about the great war of the wills... Jesus Christ uses this unusual picture of a chicken! Of all things, A CHICKEN!

"How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!" (34)

He's claiming to have been around BEFORE He was born of the Virgin... He's claiming to have long appealed to the Great City... THAT IT WAS HE who spoke through the Prophets and that there were always corrupt leaders who made people burdened and heavy laden (like the marginalized bent woman we met last week) – THERE WERE ALWAYS RELIGIOUS PROFESSIONALS AND CORRUPT PEOPLE IN POWER who didn't care for people but only preyed on them.

If the people of Jerusalem... were helpless... like little children...like sitting ducks...like vulnerable chicks in a nest...there have always been corrupt priests and leaders like Herod the fox standing by licking their lips ready to raid the hen-house...make mischief/destroy/spoil (Micah 3).

"Herod, wants to kill you!", they say, and Jesus Christ answers, "Tell that female fox (that's the word Luke uses...hmmm) TELL THAT FOX THAT I WILL NOT BE DETERRED - I WILL GO TO JERUSALEM...AND I WILL defeat the fox..."

And the animal Jesus uses to describe Himself and the defending/saving role He will play is NOT A LION OR AN EAGLE or a mighty ram...but a hen.

Farmers will tell stories of grass fires on the prairie where the burned remains of a hen have been found with chicks still alive under the wings of their mother and Jesus Christ is saying, "Let the fox do it's best to hurt My beloved people... I will spread My wings and expose My heart and I will cover (atone for) everyone who runs to Me for shelter... I will lay down My life for the Children of God... and I will rise like the Phoenix to assure them that I will make all things New!

Everyone who enters through this Door will be saved and will find a seat at the Table in the Kingdom of God... it's not the sly and cunning...not the well connected and accomplished... it's the vulnerable, the broken and weak...the helpless and failed.

"I give My life for those who don't measure up and who know it..."

And this is the bottom line of the text – a crazy-strong incentive, enticing us to come... put away your "interesting" questions and speculations... those questions you have MAY or MAY NOT even have answers... Just come to Him...maybe for the first time and maybe for the ten-thousandth... How could we say "no" to so great a love...so great a rescue? Only come now and don't delay.