

Lent 2
13/3/2022

Mark the Evangelist

Philippians 3:14-4:1
Psalm 27
Luke 13:31-35

Where prophets dare to tread

Sermon preached by Rev. Dr Peter Blackwood

The gospel lessons through Lent traditionally and understandably relate to Jesus' travelling towards Jerusalem. That is where the crucial drama will happen. But on the way there is plenty going on. On his way to Jerusalem Luke's Jesus has been saying some interesting and provocative things.

Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! (Luke 12:51) A gardener is told, 'If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.' (Luke 13:9)

To some Pharisees he said, 'You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water?' (Luke 13:15)

'Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.' (Luke 13:24)

Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' 27 *But he will say, 'I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!'* 28 *There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth...* (Luke 13:26-28)

If Jesus had been running for an elected position he was certainly getting right up the nose of his opposition. Even some who were not on his side were warning that going to Jerusalem was not a good political decision.

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." (Luke 13:31)

Did Jesus take their advice? Hardly. *'Go and tell that fox... (Luke 13:32) he replied - I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.'* Then follows the deep sigh. *'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!'* (Luke 13:34)

It looks like there are to be consequences for not being willing to be gathered by Jesus. The reader may well ask whether they are included among the unwilling, among the not gathered. Surely not. Me, the reader couldn't be a part of Jesus' deep sigh. Anyway, I am not from Jerusalem. I am Australian, and if you want to push my ancestry, I am Celtic – a long way from Jerusalem. I visited there once but surely that doesn't count. My belonging and heritage don't number with the prophet killers. My lot didn't lob stones at the ones sent by God – did they?

You can see what I am doing here. I am looking to point the finger onto someone else, at least anxious to point away from me. It might have been easier to do this if I hadn't read all the other bits of Luke to discover that no one seems to escape Jesus' deep sigh. The religious leaders are hypocrites, Judas betrays him, Peter denies him, the other disciples run away. The occupying Romans get a red card – Pilate washes his hands of

him and the rest of them didn't know what they were doing so he forgave them. In Luke's world all humanity seems to fit into the company of the unwilling.



What about our world? The image on the front of our order of service this morning was painted by an artist in St Petersburg. The artist posted the image on social media two weeks ago. Above it he wrote: 'My country invaded Ukraine. I am really sorry. I wish it never happened. Please, forgive me if there was something I could have done and didn't do.' Philip had been praying for peace for weeks. He and his wife have been on the streets protesting. They have signed petitions denouncing the war. Their son is of inscription age. Her mother lives with them and agrees with every decision the President makes. Luke's Jesus said there would be families divided. Philip has played no part in the violence against Ukraine, but he wears the shame of what is happening as if he did. As willing as he is to be a follower of Jesus, to defend the prophets, he knows himself to be part of the community of the unwilling, the ones who refuse to be gathered.

I was talking of these things with Kateryna, a Ukrainian friend, another icon painter. She told me that the stories she is hearing of the attacks and resulting privation remind her of the stories her parents told her of the time they had to leave Kiev in the Second World War.

Then she said something that came like a slap in the face. She said, 'I wonder if these stories remind our indigenous people of the times their land has been attacked and stolen by us.' Pointing the finger at what is happening half a world away was a whole not more comfortable than remembering Australian history of the past 200 years.

Jesus' deep sigh over Jerusalem applied to all its inhabitants, all its visitors, all who looked to Mt Zion for strength and inspiration and faith. Jesus' deep sigh over Jerusalem envelopes that city and all cities that have ever looked to Jerusalem as a focus of the saving actions of God – all the cities with links to the Abrahamic faiths. The sigh 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills ... and stones...' can always be applied to cities everywhere. Moscow, Moscow, the city that... Canberra, Canberra, the city that... then fill in memories of first peoples' dispossession and refugee incarceration. 'How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!'

The good news is that Jesus' desire to gather the children of the cities of the world never fades. St Anthony of Egypt said, 'To say that God turns away from the sinful is like saying that the sun hides from the blind.' Jesus' invitation to be gathered continued as he made his way into Jerusalem, as he confronted hypocritical displays of virtue, as he was tried and executed, as he rose to new life, as he ascended to reign at the right hand of the Father.
