

**“Divine Desire”**

March 17, 20149

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Luke 13:31-35

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.”

32 He said to them,  
“Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.

33 Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’

34 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!

35 See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say,

‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

**JERUSALEM BOUND**

This is the second Sunday in Lent.  
We’re on the road to Jerusalem with Jesus.

And we know what awaits him in Jerusalem.

Rejection.  
Suffering.  
Death.

You would think that Jesus  
would dread going to Jerusalem.

After all, he also knows  
what awaits him in Jerusalem.

He knows that Herod,  
that old fox, wants to kill him.

And he knows why the Pharisees are warning him about Herod.

They don't care if Jesus is harmed.  
They just want him to quit healing and preaching  
...and challenging their authority.

If I knew what Jesus knew,  
I would probably just get  
as far away from Jerusalem as possible.

But, that's not what happened.

In Luke 9:51 we read that when the days drew near for Jesus to be "taken up"  
he "set his face to go toward Jerusalem."

This is the big turning point.

Come hell or high water (literally)  
Jesus is going to Jerusalem.

And the rest of Luke's gospel is about this trip.

Jesus has no illusion about Jerusalem.  
He knows that this is the place that kills the prophets, and stones those  
who are sent to it.

But, despite that reputation,  
Jesus does not run away from Jerusalem.

Jesus does not reject Jerusalem.

## JESUS WEEPS FOR JERUSALEM

Jesus weeps for Jerusalem.

He says,

“How often I have *desired* to gather your children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.”

The key word is desire.

We know and Jesus knows that rejection, suffering and death await him in Jerusalem.

And what does he desire more than anything else in the world for this city that will reject him?

He wants Jerusalem to be saved.

The image Jesus uses in this passage is very poignant.

He likens his desire for Jerusalem to a mother hen gathering her brood under her wings.

Jesus desires to save his people.

He wants to take them under his wing.

## NOT WILLING

But, they are not willing.

Do you know what that's like?

Have you ever wanted desperately to take someone under your wing, to protect someone that you loved,

...but they were not willing?

Most of us have been there and done that.

Quite often it's a family member,

a family member who seems to be his or her own worst enemy.

So, we try and we try and we try to save them,  
but they're not willing.

When someone doesn't want to be saved,  
...well, you know,  
...they don't get saved.

How many of us have stayed up at night  
wondering how things could have been different,  
if only they were willing?

That's Jesus  
He agonizes over this:

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem the city that kills the prophets  
and stones those who are sent to save you.

I wanted to protect you.  
I wanted to take you under my wing.  
But, you were not willing."

And we know that soon the ones Jesus came to save will crucify him.

They will crucify the Son of God.  
He will be murdered  
...by the very people he is trying to save.

ARE WE NOT WILLING?

I wonder.  
Does Jesus agonize over us?

Do we, in our own way, reject and persecute the one that God sends to  
save us?

Are we  
...not willing?

Maybe we want a God  
that we can keep at a distance?

Maybe we want a God  
that doesn't hold us too close?

Maybe we want a God who doesn't pursue us,  
a God who doesn't love us so much?

Well, if we believe that God was in Christ,  
this passage teaches us that this is  
*not* the God we have.

### A LOVE THAT WILL NOT LET US GO

In Christ we learn that God truly does love us with  
(as the hymn puts it)  
a love that will not let us go.

I often say that we have God shaped hole  
in our heart, a hole that only God can fill.

But, this passage suggests  
that the converse is also true.

God has a hole in His heart for the people He loves.  
God has a heartfelt desire for all of us.

God is not a dispassionate, far away entity.

God loves us personally.  
God desires to be near us.

Like a mother with her children,  
God has a need to hold us,  
to bring us close, and to shelter us.

This is a theme that runs throughout Scripture.  
In Genesis 1 human beings are created  
in the image of God.  
From the very beginning we are connected in a personal way with the Cre-  
ator.

God touched us.  
And we touched God.

But, just a few chapters later we read that the first man and woman have sinned.

They are hiding from God in the garden.  
And the Lord asks, "Where are you?"

In that question we get a glimpse  
into the heart of God.  
God seeks his children  
even though they have sinned.  
God searches for his children, even though they don't want to be found.

## STEADFAST LOVE

That theme continues  
as we progress through the Bible.

God continues to seek and restore his people  
even though they resist, and run away at every turn.

They stone the prophets, but that does not stop the Lord from sending more prophets.

God refuses to leave God's people.  
They are not willing.  
But, God is always willing.

The people spurn God's love.  
But, as the Bible puts it,  
"God's steadfast love endures forever".  
The theme of God's steadfast love is like a bell that chimes throughout the whole Old Testament.

Over and over we hear message from a variety of biblical writers. Forty four times the bell sounds.

"The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.

The steadfast love endures forever.”

Why does this theme sound so often in Scripture?  
Because God’s people do not seem to get the message.

They don’t take it to heart.  
God’s people try to leave.  
But, God keeps drawing them back  
with a word of grace.

And that theme is picked up by Jesus.

He talks about the crazy shepherd  
who leaves the ninety nine sheep  
to seek the one who is lost.

He tells us about the gracious, loving father  
who runs to welcome his no good son back home.

Almost every story in the Bible can be viewed through the lens of the question that God asked Adam and Eve.

Where are you?

God was from the very beginning,  
a God who wants to seek and save the lost.

The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.

## OUR STORY

Don’t think that these are just stories about people  
who lived long ago and far away.  
These stories are about us.

We hide.  
We run away.  
We squander the inheritance that is ours.

And often we find ourselves far away from God.

We even persecute the prophets  
that God sends our way.

We are not willing.

But, that does not stop the Lord.  
God still seeks us.  
God still longs for us.

God still holds us in His heart.  
God's steadfast love endures for us.

Do you have a person in your life  
who loves you no matter what?  
Do you have a person  
who loves you in good times and in bad?

Do you have a person whose love never wavers?

If you do, I'll bet that person is very important to you.  
I'll bet that you wouldn't be half the person you are today if you didn't have  
that love in your life.

The problem is this.  
Even the strongest love can't last forever.

In the marriage ceremony we recognize that even the best love has an ex-  
piration date.  
We talk about loving until death parts us.

Often human love ends sooner rather than later.  
Our best efforts at loving our family and our friends can fall far short.

What causes this breakdown in love?  
Certainly part of the problem is  
that we are sinful creatures.  
We are not the men and women  
that we are called to be.

But, I think there's another reason that love breaks down in our lives.

I think we put too much pressure on our important relationships.

We want our loves to last forever.

And that is just not possible.  
Even the greatest love is imperfect.  
Even the most steadfast love cannot last forever.

All human love, one way or another,  
comes to an end.

Not so with God's love.  
The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.  
God's love is with us in the good times  
and the bad times.

God's love is with us when we're born and when we die and everywhere in  
between.

God's love is even with us when we reject that love and seek to run away.

God's love is with us  
even when we seek  
to eliminate God from our lives.

God's love is with us  
even when we seek  
to crucify his Son.

## THE PROBLEM OF THE CROSS

This past week a church member noted that I've been tackling some difficult Scripture passages. I guess every passage of Scripture is difficult if you really wrestle with the issues and the questions posed by the text.

But, the most difficult passages of Scripture are not difficult because they are hard to understand. The most difficult passages of Scripture are difficult because we don't know what to make of them.

The most difficult passages are some of the most familiar passages. The most difficult passages lie at the heart of our faith.

I'm talking about Jerusalem and the cross.  
I'm talking about Lent.  
I'm talking about this road to the cross  
that we take every year.

Just like the disciples of old,  
I don't want to take the trip to Jerusalem.  
I don't want to go through the struggle.

I don't want to preach on the cross.

But, unlike you, I have no choice.

I can't stay home.  
I'm the pastor!  
I have to preach every week, like it or not.

And though I have heard the story of the cross for many years, the details are still horrifying to me.

Several years ago Mel Gibson made a very graphic depiction of the crucifixion of Jesus.

It was hard to watch.  
It made the most violent slasher movie  
seem tame by comparison.

I would rather not watch that again.  
It's too painful.

It's like when the local news gives the gory details about some brutal murder.  
Do you know what I do when that happens?

I just turn it off or go to another room.  
I don't want to see. I don't want to hear.

But, despite our desire to turn away,  
Jesus will not let disciples look in another direction.

His face is set like flint toward Jerusalem.  
And he is taking us with him.

Jesus made sure of that when he had that Last Supper with his disciples  
and told them take that meal in remembrance of him.

And what were disciples to remember?  
“This is my body broken for you.  
This is my blood shed for you.”

It sounds like Jesus really didn't want us to forget the cross and some of  
the gory details.

In our lesson for today we hear Jesus say,  
“I must be on my way, because it is impossible  
for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.”

The cross was no accident. Jesus deliberately went to the place where  
prophets were killed. Why?

## THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

When it comes to the cross,  
we have many questions.

Why must Jesus go to Jerusalem  
and face certain death?

What is the meaning of the cross?  
Why is it so important to Jesus?  
Why should it be important to us?

And what is the connection between our salvation and Christ's death on the  
cross?

There have been many interpretations of the cross down through the years.  
Many theologians have sought to answer these questions.

We call these answers “theories of the atonement”.

You’ll be grateful to know that I’m not going to go through all those theories this morning.

If I did, we would definitely not beat the Baptists to lunch, which of course as we all know is the real goal on Sunday morning.

Suffice it to say that all of these theories of the atonement have their merits, and they all have Scripture that seems to back them up.

But, did you notice that we call them *theories* of the atonement.

Every explanation of the cross seems to be lacking. There always seems to be more to the story of the cross than we can understand.

Even our best explanation is called a theory. We can’t seem to nail down what it means.

After all these years we can’t precisely define the cross, and the salvation that it brings to the world.

I wonder. Maybe the reason we have some much trouble is that we’re leading with our head instead of our heart.

The cross is not so much a problem to be analyzed and understood. It is an example of love, love that will not let us go, in life or in death.

In one of our communion prayers we say that Jesus was murdered by people he loved.

Jesus was crucified  
...by the very people he came to save.

But, even that act of murder, even the cross

could not defeat the steadfast love of God.

God took a tragedy and turned it into a triumph.  
 God took an act of hate and turned it into a demonstration of love.

This past week we've seen another example of what hate can do when it is nurtured in our heart. Forty nine people are dead in New Zealand.

But, even in the middle of such an atrocity, there are people who are coming forward and saying, "This is not who we are." They are expressing love and support for everyone in their community and especially Muslims.

They are affirming (as we did in this community after the shootings at the Pulse nightclub) that love is stronger than hate.

That's what the cross means.  
 God's love is stronger than hate.

## PASSION

I think it's very accurate to talk about the cross and the events that surround it as the Passion of the Christ.

In the context of the cross,  
 the word passion means suffering and death.

But, I think that we should also think about the other definition of passion,  
 ...strong, overwhelming emotion.

The story of the cross is about God's passion,  
 God's divine *desire* to take us under his wing.

God's people we were not willing to accept that love long ago. And that's still true today.  
 We are still not willing you.

The message of the cross is a personal matter.

Don't spend too much time criticizing those ancient folks who crucified Jesus. Don't spend too much time criticizing extremists who take violent actions.

Think more about how we,  
in our actions and our lack of faith, also crucify him.  
Think about how we are also "not willing".

That's the point of Lent.  
That's why every year we take this hard journey.

Every year we hear Jesus passionately tell us  
that he wants to take us under his wing.  
And every year we recognize the hard truth.  
We are still not willing.

Our love is fickle.

We still follow power hungry politicians like Herod.  
We still follow half-baked theologians  
like the ancient Pharisees.

But, on the cross,  
Jesus takes us under his wing.

Jesus stretches out his wings like a mother hen.  
And beneath the cross we hear him say,  
"Father, forgive them..."

That's passion.  
That's divine desire.  
That's a love that will not let us go.

Let's set our face toward Jerusalem.

Amen.