

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

## WHAT JESUS WANTS FOR US

Luke 13:31-34 & 1 Tim. 2:3b-4; Lent 2C; March 15-16, 2025

Our Gospel Reading presents conflicting wants and desires. While Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem for the last time, some Pharisees told Jesus that King Herod wanted to kill Him, so He better stay out of his way. Jesus said He wanted to gather the people of Jerusalem as His disciples, like a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but the people of Jerusalem did not want to be gathered as His disciples. When considering wants and desires, it is important to consider the motivation behind them.

Why would some Pharisees tell Jesus that Herod wanted Him dead? Why would Herod want Jesus dead since we know that when Jesus was on trial for His life, and Pontius Pilate sent Him to be examined by Herod, Luke tells us that Herod was glad to see Jesus, hoping to see Him do some miracles (Lk 23:6-17)? Why did Jesus even want to go to Jerusalem knowing full well that the people there would reject Him and His desire to gather them as His disciples and put Him to death on the cross? Why didn't the people of Jerusalem want to be Jesus' disciples? We need to consider the motivations behind these conflicting wants and desires to understand the Reading.

As we consider Jesus' motivation for wanting to do what He was doing, we also should consider what we want and desire. Do we want what Jesus wants for us, or do we want something else for ourselves? When our wants and desires come into conflict with what Jesus wants for us, that prevents us from being His disciples.

Why some Pharisees warned Jesus that Herod wanted Him dead was not likely from good motives. Up to this point in Luke's Gospel, the Pharisees had rejected Jesus' teaching, grumbled at His acceptance of sinners, and accused Him of sinning by healing people on the Day of Rest, the Jewish Sabbath. Jesus had openly condemned the Pharisees for rejecting God at work in Him and had warned His disciples against their false teaching. Some leaders of the Pharisees sat on the Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin, which would have Jesus arrested and condemned Him to die based on false and conflicting evidence. Why some Pharisees warned Jesus about Herod's intentions does not appear to have good motives.

It might actually be the case here that they were revealing what was in their hearts rather than Herod's. When people get defensive, they often accuse their opponents of the very things they are doing. We see this in politics. We see this in divorces. The sinful human nature will resort to blaming others for its own faults, with the hope that, if the other is accused first, it will deflect blame away from itself.

This seems the case with these Pharisees. What they themselves wanted – Jesus dead – they blamed on someone else, Herod. What was in their hearts was a murderous intent.

Jesus responded to the Pharisees' warning about Herod by calling him a "fox," an animal recognized for its cunning. **"Go and tell that fox..."** Herod was no saint. When John the Baptized called him to repent for taking his brother's wife as his own, Herod had John thrown into prison. And when his wife's daughter asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter, Herod didn't want to look bad in front of his friends, so he did what she requested.

Jesus' response to those Pharisees about Herod reveals what Jesus wanted. **"Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish My course. Nevertheless, I must go on My way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem."**

The phrase **"today and tomorrow"** means something like "day by day." Jesus would continue with "business as usual" until He reached His goal in Jerusalem and accomplished the task He had come to do: preach God's Word, call people to faith in Him, heal diseases, and cast out demon, you know, save the world by dying on the cross and rising from the dead. This is what Jesus wanted, and no one was going to prevent Him from doing that.

St. Paul states in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2: **God our Savior... wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth** (2:3b-4). What do Saviors want to do? They want to save those in need of saving. What does Jesus want for us? To be saved by faith in Him.

This is why Jesus refused to be deterred by the Pharisees' veiled threats against Him that Herod wanted Him dead. What motivated Jesus was seeing all people as needing saving, even His enemies who wanted Him dead. This is what He was talking about when He said: **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you did not want [to be gathered by Me]!”** (ποσάκις ἠθέλησα ἐπισυνάξει... οὐκ ἠθέλησατε, my translation)

Jesus explains here what He wants for us as well as the extent He was willing to go to accomplish it. He compared Himself to a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings. Why does a hen do this? To protect her chicks from danger or death.

I just heard in sermon a story about how a prairie fire swept over a henhouse. When the farmer came back afterwards and found a dead hen, he kicked over her charred and dead carcass, and out from under her outstretched wings swarmed her living chicks. Maybe the hen could have fled the fire in chicken coop to save her own life, abandoning her chicks to die, but she gave her life for theirs, covering them up so the fire would not harm them. I heard this same story decades ago from at least one other pastor in a sermon. I don't know where the story originated, or even if it actually happened, but it fits well what Jesus says here.

Jesus stretched out His arms on the cross to suffer and die to save us. (This is the sort of love we expect from a mother or father when it comes to their own children. The hen cares for her chicks.) But Jesus does this not only for those who love and believe in Him as their Savior, but also for those who hate Him and want nothing to do with Him. **God our Savior... wants all people to be saved.** This was His motivation for doing what He wanted to do, and it was for us.

Jesus wants to gather us under His wings, the arms He stretched out on the cross to suffer and die. Do we want what Jesus wants for us, to be saved by faith in Him? If we want what Jesus wants for us – and I'm sure that's where you are at with this – all of us sinners have to also admit that we don't always show it by what we say or do.

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

Our fellow sinner, St. Paul, admitted this about himself, **“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I want to do what is right, but do not have the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing”** (7:18-19).

We sinners baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection are engaged in a constant struggle against our sinful flesh. Luther’s Catechism reminds us what it takes to live as Christians: “the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sin and evil desires (wants), and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” This is what Jesus wants for us, and what we want and need from Him.

In these weeks of Lent before Easter, Jesus invites us to travel spiritually with Him as He leads us to His cross and grave. Daily by contrition and repentance we die and rise with Him there. What was Jesus’ motivation for wanting to go to the cross and grave? **“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself”** (Jn 13:32). Jesus wants to draw all people to faith in Him as the One who died and rose for them.

As we follow Jesus on this spiritual journey, He is like a hen who gathers her brood under her wings. What a beautiful and comforting image to focus on. It reminds us of what Jesus wants for us: to be kept safe from all that could harm us and live now and forever by faith in Him. May we always want from Jesus what He wants for us! Amen.