

2nd Sunday in Lent, Year C: 24 February 2013

There is a battle brewing on the road to Jerusalem.
At first it looks like just another confrontation
with the religious authorities and a puppet tyrant.
But it's more than that.
It will be a battle between a hen's wings of love and a fox's claws and fangs,
a battle between stone and flesh.
That doesn't sound much like a fair fight and it isn't.
Only Jesus, however, seems to know this.

Jesus is going to Jerusalem,
making his way through cities and villages,
teaching and healing as he goes.
Some Pharisees meet him outside the city and attempt to scare him off:
"Get away from here; save your life; Herod wants to kill you."
These are words of rejection – Jesus is not welcome.
But Jesus rejects their threat, their false authority, and even the power of death.
"You go and tell that fox Herod that I am busy,
too busy to be bothered with a little sneaking killer like him.
I am busy on God's business: healing and giving life.
I will leave in my own time but only after I have completed my work
and not before then."

Jesus knows something that Herod and the Pharisees do not.
The contest was never against Herod or the Pharisees.
It was always with and for the heart, the soul, of Jerusalem.
Jesus is not Herod's problem.
Herod does not have to worry about killing Jesus.
Jerusalem will do that for him.
It always has.
The road to Jerusalem is paved with the stones of rejection.

*"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets
and stones those who are sent to it."*
"Jerusalem, Jerusalem."
In those words I hear my name.
You see, Jerusalem is the universal name.
It is the name of every family, language, people, and nation.
Jesus is really calling your name and my name.
And when I hear it, I can't help but remember the stones that I have thrown.

Stones of inadequacy – stones that say, “Go away. I’m not worth your time or love.”
Stones of arrogance – stones that say, “My way is better.”
Stones of isolation – stones that say, “I can do this all by myself. I don’t need you.”
Stones of fear – stones that build walls instead of a home in which all are welcome.
Stones of immaturity – stones that say, “I don’t want to grow.
I don’t want to take responsibility. Just let me play by myself.”
Stones of prejudice – stones that say, “You’re different from me.
You’re not wanted or needed around here.”
Stones of defensiveness – stones that say, “Don’t change or challenge me.
Let me stay in my narrow little world.”
Stones of violence that deny another’s dignity and humanity.

Each stone we throw is not simply the rejection of another.
Ultimately, it is the rejection of our self.
It says we trust fangs and claws more than we trust the wings of love.
It denies that we are God’s people, that others are God’s children.
As Jerusalem we are meant to be the Holy City of God’s residence,
not the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to it.

But Christ looks beyond the stones, extending to us the pure love of a mother.
He rejects all other roads except the one leading to Jerusalem, the one leading to us.
He rejects all false authorities – he will not allow threats, warnings,
or even the power of death to control him.
He rejects any attempt to interrupt his life-giving mission.
Over and over the wings of love are opened, waiting,
exposed to the fox’s fangs and claws.
How can love do anything less?

With each step towards Jerusalem, towards us, Jesus is saying,
“I will heal you, forgive you, and make you holy.”
With each step towards Jerusalem Jesus is saying,
“I love you and give you life, my life.”
With each step towards Jerusalem Jesus is saying,
“I will pursue you to the very end – even to death and beyond.”
He says all this even while looking at our hands, filled with the stones of rejection.

Everyday he comes to us.
We hear him in the cries of the poor, the immigrant, the homeless,
the needy, and the hungry.
We see him in the faces of those who are different from us,
who threaten us, who scare us,
those who live on the fringe of what we consider acceptable,
those who would stretch us, confront us, and maybe even change us.
We feel him in the touch of friends, parents, spouses, and mentors,
whose hands support, encourage, sustain, and challenge us.

These are the ones who reveal God incarnate.
These are today's prophets calling us to live as the New Jerusalem.
Everyday they come.
Everyday they stand before us; within a stone's throw.
And we must decide.
What do we see – prophets or targets?
And what will we say?
Will we say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord?"
Or will we say, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you"?
Oh, Jerusalem.
Oh, Duluth,
Oh my child.