

February 28, 2010 – Lent 2
“I’m Not Angry – Just Disappointed”
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Luke 13:31-35

Several years ago I had the opportunity to travel with an ecumenical group of clergy on a study tour of Israel. It was a fascinating experience that far exceeded my expectations as I traveled from the Galilee to the holy city of Jerusalem, to Qumran where the Dead Sea Scrolls were authored and later discovered, and then to Masada site of the largest Jewish mass suicide, and finally took a relaxing swim – or I should say float – in the Dead Sea.

If you have had the opportunity to travel there you know that there are chapels (of varying sizes) built on at just about every site where Jesus supposedly did something. The story that was read today is no exception. The lovely little Franciscan chapel built in the shape of a stylized tear that sits on the Mount of Olives overlooking the Temple Mount is called Dominus Felvit which means, “Our Lord Wept.” The spot is so designated as the place where Jesus wept over Jerusalem just before he was arrested, sentenced and crucified by the authorities for being a threat to the established order.

While this setting it is not primarily associated with today’s story, there is a beautiful mosaic on the altar directly in front of the large window that overlooks the city which **is** directly related. The view is quite stunning. You see the Dome of the Rock – Jerusalem’s central icon – through the window in the background with the altar and cross directly in front of you. In the mosaic on the front of the altar, the artist depicts a mother hen with her wings widespread and several and several little chicks cuddling underneath fully protected from any harm that might befall them.

When our guide read this passage as we sat in that particular chapel and I gazed at the mosaic and all that lay beyond outside the window, I felt strangely comforted by the image and the realization that this was a fitting symbol – a reminder of God’s love for me – brokenhearted, disappointed in all my mistakes I’ve made, yet a reminder of God’s grace, a love calling me, beckoning me. The call is continual – as we sang just moments ago – “Come home, come home – softly and tenderly” God is calling me to come home.

Now, hold that thought as we consider the context of this passage – whether or not this particular spot has anything at all to do with the location of **this** story.

The metaphor of the inward and outward journey has always been appropriate for the season of Lent, emphasizing deliberate reflection on the obstacles that beset us in our spiritual life and the hope for new direction as we look ahead to the promise of Easter. In the final weeks of his life, Jesus is moving ever closer to Jerusalem – the city of David – where the great prophets of the past have more often than not been ignored, reviled, or even killed. Jeremiah attests to the reception from King Jehoiakim when the prophet dared to speak out against the kingdom of Judah. Jeremiah himself almost

succumbed to the same fate, left to die in a muddy cistern after speaking words of discouragement to the people.

Jesus no doubt identified with the likes of Uriah, Zechariah and so many others whose voices greatly perturbed the ire of the Jerusalem elite. Similarly, during the reigns of kings Ahaz and Hezekiah, Isaiah sought to challenge the accepted power structure in defense of the Davidic monarchy and the presence of God in the Temple as having precedence over the political maneuvering of the rising Godless generation. They all spoke out and they all got themselves into trouble – **big trouble** – as folks who speak truth to power generally do.

Jesus was journeying toward a similar end, and he knew it well. Not even the threats coming from “that fox” Herod Antipas, the executioner of John the Baptist, could distract him from his final destination. His calling would not be thwarted by the jealous anger of the Galilean tetrarch. On the contrary, these were only momentary obstacles along this final trip to Jerusalem where he surely knew that to keep up what he was doing would eventually lead to his death.¹

Even so he utters these words of deep love for a people that had **no** idea what they were doing or why: “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 as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

When I heard those words sitting in the chapel of Dominus Flavit and peered into that icon – the mother hen protecting her chicks, my eyes were filled with tears. We know that feeling don’t we? We know what it is like to have a broken heart, to sense deep pain and disappointment in those we love most and yet we don’t have it in us to lash out in anger.

In the parent child relationship this dynamic occurs again and again. Whether or not you were/are a parent – each one of us was a child and we’ve experienced times in our lives of deep disappointment. I remember a time now so many years ago – but still seems like just yesterday – when one of my kids – I won’t reveal which one or the exact situation – there is really no need, but he did something that was so disappointing I couldn’t bring myself to being mad. All I could do was weep. We had worked so hard to get him a particular opportunity and he sabotaged a chance that could have made all the difference in the rest of his life. I just couldn’t believe it. I felt like such a failure as a parent. I was so hurt by what he did and all I could do was look at him and cry.

Similarly, I remember my mother saying those immortal words on more than one occasion when I guess I did something that also deeply hurt her. You know them. You may have heard them too or perhaps you’ve used them yourself, “I’m not angry – just disappointed.”

¹ Bartlett, David L. & Taylor, Barbara Brown, eds. *Feasting on the Word*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, Year C, Volume 2, pp 69-70, 2009.

It's that feeling Jesus was expressing. The feeling of deep pain, a broken heart, perhaps even a sense of failure. I've tried so hard to show you, to demonstrate the way of love, of justice, of peace, shalom for all people. I've tried to show you how much better your lives would be if you would but come to the one who sent me – but you would not listen. You just don't get it.

I think it's the anguish God must go through daily as God looks upon creation and sees just how much we mess up time and again.

When we exclude others because they do not conform to our expectations.

When we ignore the poor because they are a nuisance and detract from our comfort.

When we bomb other countries because our fear turns into certainty that if we don't get them first – they will surely get us.

When we abuse the planet – the only real home we have – with little concern for future inhabitants.

When we abuse our bodies with drugs, alcohol or way too much food.

When we try to seize power for ourselves or try to harness the power that belongs to God alone in order to put everything else as subject us. Ah to be just a little lower than the angels.

It's in this way that we break the heart of God. Even so, we are not willing to come under God's wing.

The good news . . . the blessing . . . the constant is the promise that the God who created us continues to beckon us no matter what, no matter who, no matter where you are on life's journey. There is nothing we can do to separate us from that love. Only we have the power to do that. We can, of our own volition cut ourselves off and ignore the grace, mercy, and love that God freely gives.

I cannot begin to know all that you are bringing into this sanctuary today. Unless you have spoken to me privately, I don't know what burdens you bear, what issues you are dealing with, what secret fears you hold. But of one thing I am certain – because I have experienced it firsthand – the loving outstretched wings of God's love are open and available to each one of us. We are not alone. Even when all else seems to fail we can be assured – we are loved by God.

As we travel further on this Lenten path, be reminded of that grace. God loves you for who you are. You don't have to prove anything. You don't have to earn it. Simply accept the fact that God loves you.

Maybe, just maybe you might take the risk of sharing that good news with someone else today – someone who desperately needs to hear an encouraging word of love. It may make all the difference in the world.

Go ahead. Tell someone. What a wonderful message to share.

Amen.