

Lent 2 (Year C)

Jeremiah 26:8-15

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

Psalm 42-43

THEME: The Savior Who Won't Go Away

Grace and peace are yours, from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

TEXT **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—’” (Luke 13:31)

Hold on—something's wrong. The Pharisees are concerned for Jesus, and warn Him that He's in danger? That doesn't sound right, because the Pharisees, if they were honestly concerned with Jesus' life, should also warn, “Oh, and by the way, we want to kill You too.”

History tells us that Herod is jealous for his throne, and will murder any competition. Additionally, Herod hears of Jesus' miracles and, in his paranoid, superstitious mind, fears that Jesus is John the Baptizer back from the dead in order to exact vengeance for his murder (Luke 9:7-9).

But the Pharisees also are greedy for their own power, and will also tolerate no possible competition. Jesus poses a threat to their teaching and authority. They'll plot to kill Him if they have to, but they also don't want a martyr on their hands, or a martyr's blood. Hence their “concern” for Jesus, telling Him to flee: it's far better for them if Jesus just goes away.

But Jesus has His own plan. He says, **“Go and tell that fox, ‘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’” (Luke 22:32).** And so Jesus deals with two scheming foxes—Herod and the Pharisees—with one simple message: No. I won't go away.

Everything He intends, everything He wills, everything He predicts, He will accomplish. He's going to Jerusalem, casting out demons and curing illness of body and soul along the way. He'll enter Jerusalem triumphantly and remain there until He will "finish the course" (Luke 13:32) it's necessary for Him to finish (Luke 13:33), being "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

Because then comes the third day—the Day of Resurrection, Easter Sunday. That is when God publicly declares to the world that Jesus has perfectly accomplished your forgiveness and salvation. It is necessary, it must happen, and so it will. And no one can stop Him—not Herod and all of his soldiers or the Pharisees with all of their schemes.

This is your comfort and hope: Your Savior is not a weak man who is overpowered by evil. Even in all the wickedness and chaos and horror of Holy Week, the Lord is still in charge. Jesus does not suffer and die on that cross because of Rome's strength or the Pharisees' schemings. He goes to that cross only because He goes willingly, because this is His plan for your salvation. Because the all-powerful Son of God loves you, and He will not be denied your redemption. No matter what, He is a Savior who won't go away.

Nothing overpowered Him and made Him be crucified, not Herod or the Pharisees or Pilate or the Romans. And not you. You didn't crucify Him either.

It is popular to say something like, "All of us sinners put Jesus on the cross," "Jesus went to the cross because of our sin." But what do we mean by that? Do we mean that our sin made Jesus be conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary? That our sin compelled Him down to the Jordan to be baptized and drove Him to the wilderness to be tempted? That our sin forced Him to be crucified?

If so, then Jesus has no power over our sin. Our sin is the one with the power. Our guilt causes the cross and Jesus has no choice in it—and so even the Gospel becomes a guilt trip: Look what your sin made Jesus do! Look what your sin made Jesus suffer! You should be grateful for it!

I was in a discussion once about fasting for Lent. One gentleman there said that during Holy Week, he went on a water fast—he ate and drank nothing except whatever water he needed to survive. His reason for this was: “Jesus suffered so much for me. So I will suffer a little for Him.”

He knew the cross was valuable and precious, but he thought he needed to suffer to make Jesus’ suffering more precious to himself. “I am a sinner; Jesus suffered to pay for my sins; therefore, I forced Jesus to suffer and die, and now I must suffer to show my appreciation.”

Jesus was coming to this poor wounded soul with full forgiveness for his sins, and he was replying, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man! Depart from me—until I make myself worthy of your love, until I suffer to be worthy of Your suffering, until I guilt myself into being worthy enough to appreciate Your grace!” He had turned Jesus’ freely-given grace into a ruthless demand of the law. How sad!

The cross *does* show us what our sins cost, the price that must be paid for sin: death and hell. Jesus shed His blood to pay for our sins because that’s the necessary payment, as it’s written: “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22); Jesus died because death is the payment owed to pay sin’s dreadful price, as it’s written: “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Yet the cross *does not* show us what our sins *made* Jesus suffer or *forced* Him to pay. The god who is forced by your sin to suffer and die, that is not the God of grace whose love forgives all sin—that is a god of obligation who is himself a slave to sin. Don’t think for an instant that your sin is so powerful it tells Jesus what to do. If that’s what we think when we look at the cross—“*My sins forced Jesus to do this*”—then that cross can only accuse and condemn us.

But Jesus' cross doesn't accuse you—it accuses Jesus. Jesus' cross doesn't condemn you—it only condemns the Holy One who hung upon it. The whole point of the cross is that you are *not* condemned, but instead are completely freed from the condemnation and guilt of the Law by the precious blood of Christ.

Jesus did what was necessary for us not because we forced Him to, but only because He loved us enough to do it freely, for our sake, so that we would not have to do what was necessary: “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

When Jesus first appears to His disciples after His resurrection, when He shows them the wounds of the cross upon His body, does He say, “Look what you made Me do! Your sins did this to Me!”? No! Instead, His resurrected body declares to them: “Look, I live! So I have conquered sin and death and hell. I live, and you also shall live. You also shall be sin’s conqueror, death’s destroyer, Satan’s crusher.” Jesus utters no curses or condemnations, gives them no grief or guilt, He instead says: “Don’t be afraid!” (Matthew 28:10), “Peace be with you!” (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21).

Likewise, the cross does not condemn you. The cross is the Gospel of grace, for you. The cross brings you “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” and “through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2).

You are freed from sin and death and hell because Christ became sin and suffered hell and died, and, what is more, descended into hell to proclaim His victory over hell and trample all of Satan’s power into dust and darkness, and then rose again from death, destroying our destroyer, devouring our devourer, so that even in the face of death Jesus proclaims to us: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26).

That's the Good News: your sins didn't *make* Jesus die. *Nothing* forced Him to die. He went willingly for you and for your salvation. And that's why your salvation is certain— because God willed it and authored it and accomplished it. Sin had no power over Him. He takes your sin upon Himself for no other reason than He wants to. He puts your sin to death with His death on the cross for no other reason than He loves you and will not abandon you to the grave.

And that's why His love for you is certain: because He is a Savior who does not go away. He didn't abandon His path to His cross, even when faced with threats and dangers, but instead His love for you is such that He willingly did what was necessary to forgive all your sins, to rescue His lost sheep, to restore His own dear child.

And His love for you is such that He still does not go away. He still never abandons you but promises always to be present with you and for you. That's His name, after all: Immanuel, God-With-Us. He is a Savior who won't go away, because He's given you His Word, which He has brought directly to you and nurtured in your soul.

He's a Savior who won't go away, because He's given you His Baptism, which He has washed over you to cleanse you from all sins and create a heart of sainthood within you. In His Lord's Supper He Himself is present with you with the full forgiveness for all your sins He won for you with His cross, once for all, to ensure that your trust in Him is nourished and your reliance on His steadfast love is strengthened in any time of need.

He does not leave you nor forsake you. He forgives you and restores you. No matter what, He is your Savior who won't go away.

AMEN.