

"What Elphaba and Jesus May Have In Common"

Luke 13:31-35

Sermon Notes from the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois

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Some of you saw the Broadway play *Wicked*, which is the prequel of the Wizard of Oz. You might not have noticed the quiet song in the middle of Act One when Elphaba—who is not like the other kids because her skin is green—realizes that, because she's different, she will be forever misunderstood, and forever left on the outside looking in. She sings about the love she'll never know and the love that will never be returned:

Hands touch, eyes meet
Sudden silence, sudden heat
Hearts leap in a giddy whirl
He could be that boy
But I'm not that girl:

It's sad to watch Elphaba. You feel her ache. You want to make it better for her.

Don't dream too far
Don't lose sight of who you are
Don't remember that rush of joy
He could be that boy
I'm not that girl

Jesus is not a green witch in college. And he's not the protagonist of a make-believe story. But Jesus does know what it's like to be the outsider.

Our text today finds Jesus in Jerusalem. He's teaching, and healing, and showing by word and deed how broad God's love is. People are amazed and delighted by this good news, and they are perplexed, curious, and open. But the powers that be are not enthusiastic. Some Pharisees come to him and warn him that Herod is out to kill him.

Jesus is pouring himself out. He is giving his whole heart. And a significant part of the population can't/won't/don't receive it. His love is not taken as a healing touch, but as a hostile threat. To many, he's not the Christ, but the anti-Christ. To some, his word doesn't bring hope, but apprehension; even people who would believe are frightened that Jesus will upset the apple cart. *Chill out Jesus. We've never done it this way before.*

No, Jesus is not a teenage college freshman with green skin. But he's on the outside looking in. And many of our teenage friends know what that feels like. They know how lonely that can be. They know how heavy the future can feel. They know what it's like to be misunderstood. People of all ages and every age can know these feelings.

Here in this text from Luke we find the misunderstood Jesus weeping over the people who would bring him harm:

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Your people have killed the prophets and have stoned the messengers who were sent to you. I have often wanted to gather your people, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you wouldn't let me."

You wouldn't let me.

Here on the outskirts of the ancient city, can you hear Jesus call? *When will you let me in? How long will you hold me at arm's length?* The lover of our souls wonders: *when will you receive my love?* The great physician wants to know: *When will you allow me to tend your deepest wounds?* The Holy Counselor is asking: *When will you share your deepest hurts and your most irrational fears with me?*

Jesus stands at the edge of the city, on the hill overlooking our homes and places of work. He knows what it's like to be the odd man out. He takes seriously the feelings of the outcast teen, the has-been old-timer, the passed-up wallflower. He resonates with the refugee. He's always noticed the underserved; he's always paid attention to the profiled minority; he's always been willing to get his hands dirty with the dead, like Lazarus, and the living-dead like the leper, the adulterous woman, and the tax collecting sinner.

It is these people that the religious leaders of his day would stir up to shout "crucify, crucify." But he loves them anyway. He loves them still. He's willing to stand up for them, reach out to them, die for them.

On the outskirts of Jerusalem, this misunderstood Christ stands hurting, banished, heavy-hearted, filled with love for those who will not/cannot let him in.

No matter the danger, Jesus continues his faithful ministry, keeping a close eye on Jerusalem—weeping for Jerusalem, oh Jerusalem. He is weeping for us, too, waiting for us, praying for us, calling us. Calling us to follow.

Calling. Calling.

"Where cross the crowded ways of life,
where sound the cries of race and clan,
 above the noise of selfish strife,
we hear your voice, O Son of Man."

"Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life"