**Lent Two – ‘Moving Forward: Letting Go’ (March 13, 2022) (Luke 13:31-35)**

Run, run for your life! He’s out to kill you!

I don’t know about you, but if anyone approached me with those words – I am pretty sure that I would run. It’s not that I am coward, but I wonder if I would truly stand my ground if I knew my life was at risk.

And yet – that is what Jesus does. As he makes his way to Jerusalem, he stops at villages and towns to preach, teach, and heal. He knows that there is still work to be done. He knows that his ministry of peace and justice is not over. There are people that are sick that need healing; there are demons to be cast out. His work for the Kingdom of God is not finished. And so, he says that he will continue on his journey to Jerusalem, even though he knows that Herod wants him killed. Jesus does not ‘run for his life.’

It is not difficult to see parallels in this scripture and in what is happening in Ukraine today. Civilians like you and I – who have never held a weapon before, never been trained for combat. They are just ordinary people -teachers, lawyers, farmers, boys just 18 years old – they believe in democracy – and so they are willing to stand their ground even though it means risking their lives. They know that Putin, like Herod, wants power at whatever cost. But still, they bravely defend truth and democracy.

And we have seen news reports that show the tears flowing down the cheeks of families torn apart. The tears of grief and worry of the refugees for loved ones left behind. We have seen the lament of the Ukraine people – and we lament with them.

In the same way, Jesus wept and grieved over the state of his beloved Jerusalem. The people just didn’t understand what Jesus was all about. He longed to gather them and protect them. He says:

*How often I’ve longed to gather your children,
    gather your children like a hen,
Her brood safe under her wings—
    but you refused and turned away!*

(Luke 13:34)

As Jesus laments over Jerusalem, you can hear his heart breaking. He knows that time is running out. He knows that Jerusalem has a long history of rebelling against God, and of refusing the way of peace. And Jesus knows that they will rebel again – they will reject him and the kingdom that Jesus offers. He knows that his death is inevitable.

Theologian N.T Wright comments:

 *“Jesus, in obedience to his vocation, is to go to Jerusalem and, like a mother hen with her chickens, to take upon himself the full force of the disaster.”*

And we too, of course know the end of the story – we know what will happen when Jesus enters Jerusalem.

But Jesus loved his people so much, that he was willing to continue to preach his message of love and peace- one of healing, compassion, acceptance, and unity. A message that was not popular in the Roman Empire – and one that quite frankly is not popular sometimes today too.

Like the people of Jerusalem, we too carry our own reluctance to sometimes truly be open to the message that Jesus preaches.

We have our own prejudices and are sometimes stuck in our own traditions, that we find hard to change. And we have a human tendency to sometimes be unwilling to engage in dialogue and to evolve through it.

In Canada, we are beginning to learn how our history is full of terrible discrimination based on race, ethnicity, class, religion, etc.

We are learning to hear the stories of our Indiegious people, and to recognise discrimination in the BIPOC community. And if you are not sure what BIPOC stand for, then learning that it stands for ‘Black, Indigenous, People Of Colour’ is a good place to start.

This week the United Church is focusing is on discrimination due to sexual orientation and gender identity. On March 14th, the United Church is celebrating PIE day – no, not delicious pies like the Elderberry Pie that Mary Alice Roth made for our online auction. PIE day in the United Church stands for Public, Intentional, and Explicit.

Communities of Faith are invited to do some thinking about how do we connect and affirm the LGBTQ community.

To explain this a little more, I invite you to watch this video from Moderator Rev Richard Bott:

[You’re invited to join Moderator Bott in a slice of PIE Day 2022 - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g72enzmFiwU&t=194s) (3.35 mins)

How can we at Grace celebrate diversity, and live into the reality that everyone belongs?

Maybe it begins with the way that we enter and exit our place of worship. As we return to in person worship, are you willing to forfeit using the front door to enter at the back of the church? And instead, enter at the front of the church, using the side door and the staircase near the elevator? In doing so, you are making a stand for accessibility by literally walk with those who have mobility issues.

Because accessibility is not just about providing an option – it is treating people equally and with dignity. It is breaking down barriers and divisions.

In the last few months Grace’s Session and Board have reviewed your wedding policy, and have opened it up to allow for non-members to get married in this beautiful sanctuary. But, are you willing to open your sanctuary up to same sex marriages?

We know that we like the comfort of things being as we have always known them – surrounded by people who share our culture, language, and customs.

Like the Pharisees, we might sometimes be guilty of trying to shut down, to stifle, “to kill” the new vision or approach that is offered.

And I think that when we are reluctant to change; reluctant to live out Jesus’ ministry of compassion, love, and unity – then it makes God weep.

In our hymn from More Voices today we sang that *“God weeps at love withheld, at strength misused … and until we change the way we love, God weeps.”*

In the weeks to come we will remember Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem.

And in Luke’s gospel, are told in Chapter 19 :

*“As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it saying, if you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!* (Luke 19:41-42)

We know in our hearts the things we need to do that make for peace.

We know the ways that we need to change the way we love.

We know the unnecessary baggage that we hold onto.

We know what we need to let go of, so that we can courageously embrace change and challenge.

And, we also know, that God gives us strength to move forward.

Let us, then, take time this Lent to examine the things that are holding us back. And I invite you to hand them over to God.

To call on the Spirit to embrace you like a mother hen.

To renew your commitment to live in the way that God intended.

So that together, as a community of faith, we can have a vision of a new heaven and a new earth.

Amen.