

**Parts of the Saving Passion:
Lamentation**

Genesis 15:1-12; Luke 13:31-35

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Have you ever loved someone you couldn't protect? Maybe it was a daughter. You loved her more than you loved your own life. And it broke your heart when she began to dabble in illegal drugs. You tried to intervene. You warned her. You prayed with all your might. You wept through many nights. "It's no big deal!" she insisted. "I'm careful and I know what I'm doing."

Or maybe it was a son. He always loved speed. A fast skateboard. A faster bike. And then he turned sixteen and got a drivers license. You sat him down and talked with him. You explained the dangers of driving, especially at high rates of speed. The only other thing you could do was pray, and you did. "I've got it," he said impatiently. "You don't need to worry about me."

Or maybe it was your wife. You felt her slipping away day by day. Occasionally she would describe the swirling darkness, the deep depression. But mostly she kept silent. You cared. You listened when you could. And how you prayed. "I'm losing my life," she would confess. "Nothing brings me pleasure. I just want the pain to end."

Most of us have some experience of loving someone we could not protect. We know the sense of helplessness. Seeing the danger mount. Efforts to persuade. The prayers. Tears. And then anticipating the inevitable. Oh, how painful it is to love someone you cannot protect!

If you can understand that, you can understand our text from the Gospel of Luke. It is one of the most heartrending scenes in the New Testament. From the Mount of Olives, just across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem, Jesus gazed upon his beloved city, Jerusalem. The city represented his people, God's people, those whom he loved and wanted to protect. He prayed for them. He shed tears for them. And there on

the Mount of Olives, he expressed deep, mournful lamentation. Listen to these haunting words:

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 together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.

This story really begins back in Luke 9:51, a verse some claim is the hinge in Luke's gospel. The whole gospel swings on this verse when Jesus, Luke says, "set his face to go to Jerusalem." It is a picture of sheer determination. From that point onward, the Gospel of Luke is about Jesus' drive to get to his beloved city, Jerusalem. He faces interruptions. He sent the Seventy on their mission two-by-two, remember? He saw that the harvest was plentiful, and the laborers were few. But he could not stay there; that wasn't his mission. He was waylaid by a lawyer who wanted to test him. "And who is my neighbor?" the lawyer wanted to know. In response, Jesus told him the parable of the Good Samaritan. But he wouldn't be waylaid for long. He got to the village where Mary and Martha lived. They received him into their home. Mary sat at his feet and listened to Jesus as Martha rushed about the house. But he couldn't stay. He took time to teach his disciples about prayer, telling them the story about the woman who continued to knock and knock and knock on a door until it finally opened. But he didn't tarry there either. He cast out demons, challenged the Pharisees, encouraged his disciples, told more parables, healed an infirmed woman, and faced many other interruptions. None of those were his purpose. Those were stops along the way to his destiny; they were not his destiny. He set his face to go to Jerusalem. That was his destiny.

One of my seminary professors, Dr. Alan Culpepper, says that Jesus was driven by "divine necessity." (*The New Interpreter's Bible*, Luke, p. 281) "I *must* be on my way," he declared.

Just like when he was a child and said to his parents at the temple, "I *must* be in my father's house."

And later when he insisted, "I *must* proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God."

And again when announced, “The Son of Man *must* undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders.”

He even said it to Zacchaeus, “Hurry and come down, for I *must* stay at your house today.”

Jesus knew: “For I tell you, this scripture *must* be fulfilled in me.”

Divine necessity. He set his face to go to his beloved city, Jerusalem.

In our text from Luke 13, Jesus finally reached his destiny. He made it to the outskirts of Jerusalem, and something interesting, something out of character, happened. It appears that the Pharisees, with whom he was normally at odds, tried to help Jesus. Or maybe they were following the old adage: “Keep your friends close and your enemies even closer.” Whatever their motive, Luke says that they warned Jesus to leave Jerusalem because Herod, the king, was out to get him. He had already beheaded John the Baptist, remember? Now Herod wanted to kill Jesus, too, perhaps presenting his head on a platter also. So what does a prudent man do when he learns that the king is out to kill him? He gets out of Dodge, right? Or in this case, out of Jerusalem. Unless that man is Jesus and is driven by divine necessity. He had reached his destiny, and nobody would interfere with what had to be done there, not even the king, whom Jesus called a “fox.” Sly. Cunning. Destructive. “Go and tell that fox” that I’m busy. I’ve got work to do here, and even he won’t prevent it.

Some of you have seen paintings of this scene, as I have. Often they are dark and show Jesus on a mountain with his disciples. In the distance, you can see the silhouette of the city of Jerusalem. He looks out over his beloved city, a symbol of all God’s people, and it’s as if you can hear the painting itself lament:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem.... How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

It's a tender, feminine image. A mother hen is trying to protect her chicks. Maybe there are five or six chicks in the brood scurrying in all directions. She knows a fox is lurking in the shadows—sly, cunning, destructive—waiting for an opportunity to snatch those little chicks. So she works frantically to pull them in under her wings. She gets a few under one wing and reaches for the others. As she reaches for the others, the ones she has protected break loose and scamper away. The mother hen knows the danger. She knows what that fox can do to her little chicks. Oh, how painful it is to love someone you cannot protect.

Here's something I find most interesting. Of all the animals in the animal kingdom, Jesus chose a mother hen to describe himself. Not a lion, as C. S. Lewis suggested. Not a bear. Not a Bengal tiger. He chose a mother hen who would stand between her chicks and those who would do them harm, knowing it would cost her her life. As Barbara Brown Taylor says, "She has no fangs, no claws, no rippling muscles. All she has is her willingness to shield her babies with her own body. If the fox wants them, he will have to kill her first." (*Christian Century*, February 25, 1986)

A part of the saving passion is lamentation. He loved them. And yet he could not protect them. Jesus lamented the willful people of Jerusalem. He lamented the sly, cunning, and destructive forces at work. Jesus lamented what would be required of him to protect the people, God's people.

As we make this Lenten journey, I invite you to look closely at this scene from Luke 13. See Jesus. The sense of helplessness. Danger mounting. The prayers. Tears. And then anticipating the inevitable. Oh, how painful it must have been for Jesus to not be able to protect the ones he loved. Then look at the brood of chicks as they scurry around. Look closely and find the one that bears your own image.

Closing Prayer

It is with profound humility, Lord, that we acknowledge who we are. And it is with profound gratitude that we acknowledge what you've done. Amen.