

SERMON FOR MARCH 13, 2022

TEXT: LUKE 13: 31-35

THEME: ARE YOU ALL IN?

31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." **32** And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. **33** 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.' **34** O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! **35** Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

In the name of Jesus:

On February 15, 2015 21 Coptic Christians were put to death because they believed in Jesus Christ. It happens all too often, brothers and sisters in Christ being persecuted and put to death for no other reason than they profess faith in Jesus. As horrible as this crime was, it serves as an example and witness to us today of what it means to take one's faith in Christ seriously and to be totally invested in Christ and the work of His Church.

The 21 men who were executed that day were itinerant tradesmen working on a construction job. All of them were native Egyptians, but one was a young African man whose identity remains uncertain. He was described as coming from the nation of Chad or Ghana.

The executioners demanded that each hostage state his religious allegiance. Each was given the opportunity to deny their faith in Christ, each was threatened with the prospect of death if they did not profess that there was only one God and Allah was his name, and Mohammed is his prophet. Under the threat of death each person declared their faith in Jesus. They were steadfast in their faith, even in the face of evil, and each person was beheaded.

The unknown man from Africa, though, when captured, was not a Christian at the time of his capture. But when he was challenged by the terrorists to declare his faith, he reportedly replied: "Their God is my God." In that moment, before his death, he became a Christian. He trusted in Christ and gave his life in martyrdom to the One who gave His life in death for all. What a remarkable example and witness! It showed that this new believer was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice by being martyred for Christ. He was, as they say today, all in. ARE YOU ALL IN?

In our text for today Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod was out to kill Him. But Jesus was not shaken; for He knew that His life and death were in the hands of His Heavenly Father. It wasn't Herod that was going to end Jesus' life; rather Jesus' life would be given over to death because of the will of God.

Herod was the king of the Jews, a king in the long line of Kings whose throne was descended from the great King David. David was a great King

because God made him a great King. David loved God more than anything else. Yes, David was a sinner; he was a man who had his shortcomings. He sinned in committing adultery with Bathsheba, then tried to cover it up by killing her husband, Uriah. By all accounts David was a great king and military leader, but he was a lousy father, so much so that one of his sons sought to kill him! But in spite of all of this, David was all in, so to speak, he was a sinner saved by grace and then lived under the grace of God, seeking to love God first and foremost and show his love for God in love for all.

Herod was no king David. Yes, he was a Jew, a King, a scoundrel like David, but that is where the similarities end. Herod lived like the nation he ruled, in that Herod neither loved God nor his neighbor. Herod paid lip service to God. He said he believed in God but only in a way that would serve Herod. Herod believed when it was convenient to believe in God. If God demanded something from Herod, like faith, or showing his faith, Herod could not do this because he had no faith. He was like the rich man that Jesus spoke of in the Parable of the Rich Man, who lived his life as if God did not exist and God's Word did not matter. He lived as an enemy of God. That is why it should come as a surprise that Jesus responded to the warning by saying: "Go tell that Jackal, Herod Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. **33** 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.” The kings of the Old Testament and the people of the Old Testament continually, time after time, rejected the prophets and their warning to turn from sin and idol worship, to repent and come back to God. That is why prophet after prophet’s life met its end in death at the hands of the unbelieving kings. Isaiah, for one, had his message rejected and he was sawn in two all because the kings rejected God’s messengers and God’s Word. Jeremiah, as we see in the Old Testament lesson for today, told the people to repent in no uncertain terms. But his message was rejected; Jeremiah was thrown into a cistern and threatened with death. Note Jeremiah’s response: “The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. **13** Now therefore mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you. **14** But as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. **15** Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears.” And Jesus would be no different, in that He had come into the world and many would reject His message, including Herod!

God simply wanted His people to love Him first and foremost, to be all in, so to speak. God's command is to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Herod would have none of it. But this was the will of God. Just listen to Jesus' word and the heartbreak in these words: "**34** O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing. Your house is forsaken." God wanted time and again to embrace and surround His people with His love, but they would not have anything to do with God. God wants a people to love, and to have that people love Him in return. But Herod and the nation he led, Israel, wanted to have nothing to do with God. They wanted God on their own terms. So God said have it your own way. God will not force Himself on anyone. If you reject God, He will reject you!

But God will not forsake His own, God loved His own, so much so that Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem to be betrayed into the hands of sinners, to suffer, be crucified, and ultimately rise again from the grave on Easter morning, to defeat sin, Satan, and death for all who believe in Him. God the Father would forsake His only Son on the cross, so that God would forsake no one who turns to God. Herod and many would reject God and His grace, and sadly, God would reject them. However, like King David, all who repented

of their sins and asked for God's mercy would receive His mercy. And make no mistake, God is merciful to sinners. Jesus, God's one and only Son was the One who knew so sin and became sin for you so that you would be forgiven. For if you confess your sins He is faithful and just and will forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

The question for each of us to ponder is: Are you all in? Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, or are you one to hedge your bets, so to speak. After all, you don't want to appear to be too "religious" do you? What would your others think if you really loved Christ? How would your priorities and life be changed if you sought to put God first in everything? What would your checkbook look like at the end of the month if you really decided to make a financial commitment to the Lord and His Work?

When I was growing up my favorite candy was Pez candy. They still sell Pez candy but what Pez candy is known for is the Pez dispenser. Pez is known as an interactive candy, as loading and then using the toy like dispenser distributes the candy. It is a toy-like dispenser, shaped like a Bic cigarette lighter. The Pez dispenser offered at first peppermint candy and was originally made and used to encourage people to quit smoking. You pop open a Pez when you have the urge to smoke. The phenomena caught on so much so that Pez began marketing their candy to kids, and eventually collectors.

You can now buy Pez dispensers featuring Curious George or Bugs Bunny on the top. And all you have to do is flip open that top, so that the candy comes out the top. Only when you use it in this way, flipping open the top, will the candy come out.

I think today that many treat God and their relationship with Him like He is a Pez dispenser. Only when they want or need God will they come to God and use Him, and that is the extent of their faith. They will use God, they will go through the motions, they will say all the right things, but when it comes to dedicating their life to the Lord, well, they aren't all in. Far from it! They will come to church when they want, if they want, they will read their Bible infrequently, but when they need something from God, well, just like the Pez dispenser, God only becomes necessary when you feel the religious urge.

Are you one who treats God in such a way? Lent is a wonderful time to reflect upon your relationship with God. God calls you to repent, to turn from sin, and to trust in Christ as your Savior. God wants to envelop you in His arms and shower you with His love, so that you will live under Him and serve Him in all you do. So, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, **2** do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, not being lazy, but serving the Lord with zeal." To the glory of God and in the name of Jesus. Amen