

“Where does the joy come from?” 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.” 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. 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.’ 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! 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!’”

Today is the second Sunday in Lent. How do we usually think about Lent? It is a time for quiet reflections on Jesus’ sufferings. We could say that this is not too joyful a time in our the church year. But is it true?

What about our today’s reading? What is it about? Sure we can say that it is about Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem. And that definitely is one of emphasis in today’s Gospel text.

However, there is other emphasis as well, and that is on Jesus mission and I would add, on joy, on true joy. These are the two things we’ll meditate upon today. On Jesus mission and how it relates to our Christian calling, and on joy, on true, divine joy.

Let’s see how Luke describes this even. He begins with somewhat unexpected note that the Pharisees warned Jesus, that Herod wants Him dead and advised Jesus to leave that place. Where they genuine, or was it some kind of trickery?

We don’t know for sure. Of course, there were Pharisees who became Jesus’ disciples. And there were Pharisees who didn’t wish Him well. But this is not the point. The main point is seen when we look at what Jesus replied to them.

“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.”

What was Jesus saying? Put it simply. ‘Guys, nothing and no one will change my course. Nothing will make me to turn away from my mission. Nothing will lessen my commitment. Nothing, neither Herod who may want me dead, not my friends, who truly care about me.’

“Behold, I cast our demons and cure people”. This is our Lord and Saviour! He cares not only for our souls, but also for our bodies, or we can say for our general

wellbeing. We can see His compassionate heart in everything He does. Thus Jesus indicates what His ministry is about and what He has come to bring us. Restoration of our goodness and total wellbeing, or we can shalom.

“Today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.” First two is just a Hebrew expression, which describes ongoing action. So Jesus will continue to do, what He has come to do. But on the third... what is this third day?

What will happen on the third day? Yes, Jesus resurrection. What Jesus says is that nothing will change His course, His mission until it is fulfilled, and it will be fulfilled only with His resurrection.

See, Jesus knows, He knows exactly what is going to happen. He knows exactly what He will have to suffer, how much His mission will cost Him, how painful it will be, and still, His commitment to you is unbelievable. Even suffering and death can't change His mind. He will complete His mission, whatever the costs.

“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.” That's basically the same thing restated again. Jesus knew where He was heading.

“It cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.” Jesus was born to die and to rise again, for His death and resurrection is the beginning of new life; of eternal life for all who want to be with Him and to have Him as their Lord.

This is how we can see Jesus mission: born to suffer, be crucified and die, and then as the fulfilment of His mission - to rise again on the third day. This is exactly how our Creeds summarize Jesus life. “Born of virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead, and on the third day rose from the dead.”

Quite short a summary of so eventful life. Is it a joyful picture? Don't rush to answer! Yes, actually it is a joyful picture. I'll explain. Have you ever prepared gift for your loved ones in secret?

A surprise party, or very important present, something that would mean heaps for them. Have you done it? How did you feel when you did it? Excited, joyful, impatient to see the faces of your loved ones when they finally receive your gift?

Is it easy to make a gift, that is really precious, that makes ones heart to jump, and tears of joy and gratitude to run down their face? I guess not. Every gift takes an effort. The bigger the gift, the greater the effort and the higher the cost.

The higher the cost the greater your joy as you prepare it. Is this right? Sure it is. We know it from our experience, that if we want to make our loved ones happy, the more we give them, the more it costs to us, the more joy it gives.

Jesus joy was ultimate. He was going to give up His life for those whom He loved so much. For you. For each of you. He did it before you even knew about it. He had decided to do it before the creation of the world. He wanted to show the depth of His love to you, giving Himself for you, entirely.

We experience this joy, when we sacrifice ourselves for those whom we care for. This is the most wonderful thing that we may experience in our lives. And this is exactly what Jesus wants you to experience.

He gave Himself entirely to His mission, to your salvation. And now, when He has sent His Holy Spirit into your hearts, so that you could rejoice in the gift of salvation, He wants you to experience the same joy that He did. How?

It is rather simple. As Jesus said: “If you love me, keep my commandments.” What are these commandments? Sure, it applies to all God’s commandments, but what were these few things which Jesus specifically commanded His disciples after His resurrection and before His ascension into heaven?

To proclaim repentance and forgiveness of all our sins to all nations. To make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Triune God and teaching them everything that Jesus has commanded us.

This is it. This is our recipe for true joy. Jesus was loved by His Father and inspired by the Father’s love He joyfully took on His mission to save us. Now, we are loved by Jesus and the Father, and now God sends us to continue His mission.

You are sent to bring salvation to others. By telling them what God has done for them in Jesus Christ. By calling them to turn from their empty lives following different idols, and to turn to the living God, who is the source of all good things, of joy and peace, security and meaning, of all the blessing we may ever dream about.

As we read, Jesus was so, so committed to His mission, even if He knew what it is going to cost Him. For He knew what a wonderful gift He is preparing for us. How about you? How committed are you to continue what Jesus did and what He commanded you to do?

How committed are you to share with others what Jesus has done for them, and what He has prepared for them? What costs are you ready to bear? For there is no way that we could be faithful to God, and not to bear a cost.

Remember, what Paul wrote to Philippians? Try to imitate Paul and others, who sacrificed everything so that only they can give people the greatest gift, the forgiveness of sins; for it comes in a bundle with eternal life in God’s presence.

Paul also wrote about Christians who act not as servants of Christ, but as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their god is their belly. Put it in other words, their god is themselves.

They care about themselves more than about Christ's mission and more than about the salvation of those who are still captives of Satan. Their mind is set on earthly things, those are their priorities. This is where their thoughts are, and where their time, energy and money goes.

“But not so for you, as Paul said, for ‘your citizenship is in heaven, and from it you await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform your lowly body to be like his glorious body.’”

What Paul wrote is a good reminder to us as well. Aren't we often enemies of the cross? Ashamed to witness about Jesus. Don't we often focus on earthly things more than our Jesus Christ and the mission that He has entrusted to us? Doesn't it happen with us that we forget that we are citizens of God's Kingdom, His heir and that we need to act accordingly?

It is good to be reminded of our shortcomings for it is easy to lose our focus in this world which today revolves so fast. But even better is to be reminded where is the source of true joy for us as Christians.

Jesus said: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments”. You will go and share the message of forgiveness with those who haven't heard it yet. And, yes, it is costly task.

Probably it won't require our lives, even if today it daily requires the lives of people who want to remain faithful and experience your joy despite of all threats and obstacles.

There are good news for us as we consider how can we be faithful to Jesus' mission. Listen to this! Situations for the Church in Barossa has never been better than it is now. You heard it correct, this is what I said, - the situation for the Church in Barossa has never been better. How so?

There have never been around here that many people who haven't heard about Jesus Christ, about God's forgiveness and new life. Never! We have more opportunities to experience divine joy that ever before. This is certainly true.

Of course, we can't do it without cost. First of all you will have to sacrifice your time. You will have to sacrifice your energy. You may need to review your priorities. You will have to learn how to do it. It may even cost financially. And there is no way around it.

But, that's a beauty of Christian mission. The greater the cost, the greater our joy. Just imagine what kind of gift we are bringing to people, - new life in God's presence. There is nothing more precious.

Imagine that you stand with Jesus Christ in His Kingdom and there are people among God's saints, who have heard about Jesus from you. What a joy! At that moment we could regret only one thing, that we haven't done more to bring more people to Christ.

It is a season of Lent, but it is also a joyful time for us. We can rejoice in what our Lord has done for us fulfilling His mission, and we can rejoice as we think how to carry on this Jesus' mission.

Jesus knew what His mission was. He knew that He will pay the ultimate price, but He also knew that His mission will be fulfilled in His resurrection, and He rejoiced in it, despite all the costs.

We know that to continue Jesus' mission will cost us. We'll have to bear our sacrifices. But we also know that resurrection and life with risen Jesus and countless number of His saints is what awaits us. This is the source of our joy.

I pray that we all have this joy abundantly and that we can enjoy the fruits of being in Jesus' mission.

Amen.