

Second Sunday in Lent – 2025

Jeremiah 26:8-15

Philippians 3:17—4:1

Luke 13:31-35

There were breadlines – long, winding columns of destitute people waiting to receive free food because they couldn't support themselves. The unemployment rate was a staggering 23%. The stock market had endured a catastrophic collapse three years prior and was many years away from recovery. Breadlines: they became a symbol of widespread poverty, widespread despair. Around the same time, a severe drought consumed the Great Plains region of the United States. The Dust Bowl was the result. Ecological disaster further drilled uncertainty into the psyche of America. The Great Depression – it wasn't merely economic. A latent fear was rising the hearts of our forebears. A muscular nation was looking at its shoe tops, wondering if what they were enduring was some sort of divine judgment. In 1932 a recently elected president said this in his inaugural address: "This great nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." That was brilliant.

Fear; there are those who use others' fear in order to manipulate them. How many of y'all like to be manipulated? Satan loves fear. Satan loves to manipulate humanity, and fear is one of his favorite points of leverage. On a lighter note, Yoda says that fear is the path to the dark side and he's not altogether mistaken. They're called "scare tactics." It's a pretty straightforward strategy... arouse fear in one's audience in order to steer their behavior to one's advantage, ultimately providing a bogus solution that supposedly solves the crisis. A scraggly band of Pharisees come to Jesus mouthing their scare tactics. "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you" (Luke 13:31). Do you think that these hypocrites have Jesus' best interest in mind? Whenever your enemies pretend to be your friends you know that danger is afoot. Beware of Greeks bearing gifts (that's the lesson of the Trojan horse). Beware of Pharisees bearing counsel. In this case the hypocrites are counseling cowardice. Go on, Jesus, be yellow. Cut and run; turn tail and run; leave this region because your life is in danger. Forsake your teaching, forsake your followers, forsake your mission, save your skin and leave this religion stuff to us.

Fear; how do you handle it? Fear; are you easily manipulated? Do you believe that Satan no longer uses this tactic, this weapon, this ruse? God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous. Moses had died and now Joshua would lead Israel. Do you aspire to be strong and courageous? No matter your vocation, no matter your age or your social standing, male or female, irrespective of your length of time in the faith, God is at work in you to make you strong and courageous. Memorize this: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). Jesus was not going to be manipulated by the Pharisees. And Herod was not a paper Tiger. Herod had John the Baptist beheaded. Herod's father, Herod the Great, had mercilessly slaughtered all the baby boys in and around Bethlehem when Jesus was born. A cruel, vindictive, sinister heart beat in Herod's chest. Jesus knew it. The Pharisees knew it. But that's not the point. The point is that if Jesus abandoned His path, if He avoids suffering, if He were to act on the Pharisee's counsel then those

same Pharisees could attack Jesus on that very basis as a false prophet. Cut and run? That's just not going to happen.

Is the church strong and courageous? As you might suspect, I've seen many, many people suffer. I have also seen in those same people remarkable courage. We've been told that if we build our house on the rock, no matter what storm blows the house will stand. "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24). What is it that eliminates fear? What is it, in the heart of man, that eviscerates fear, that inspires a deep-seated confidence, a genuine trust that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose? Listen to how Jesus responds to the Pharisees: "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course'" (Luke 13:32). That last bit isn't translated very well in the English Standard Version. This is better: "the third day I am brought to my goal." What is it that Jesus is holding onto? He's holding onto His resurrection. Did you hear the passive voice? Who is it that will bring Jesus to His third-day-goal? His Father; God the Father; that's where Jesus' trust is. That trust makes the Messiah strong and courageous.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, on the night of His arrest, Jesus begs for His Father to take the cup of suffering from Him. But the Lord trusts His Father's will. The Son of God is obedient to His Father's will. Jesus is the new and greater Joshua. The Lord Christ is the One who brings us into the Promised Land. As Good Friday approached, the Jesus knew what He was going to face. The hate, the torment, the evil that would envelope Him as He hung pierced to a Roman cross. Jesus knew that He was the atoning sacrifice, offered for the sins of humanity. Jesus knew that He and He alone would pay the price. The darkness of human depravity fell on Him. My sin, and yours, fell on Him. The sum total of all that is profane and hellish and deserving of divine punishment – He bore it, He was punished for it, He died bearing it. The third day I am brought to my goal. What is it that inspires the human heart? Jesus Christ is risen; that's what inspires the human heart. What makes us strong and courageous? Death has no sting; that's what makes us strong and courageous. What is the rock upon which we are built? The crucified King rules this world with His grace and His love and His blood and His victory and His infinite authority. That is the rock upon which we are built.

He has gathered us into His church. Like a hen gathers her brood under her wings, the Lord Christ has gathered us into His church. He lamented Jerusalem's lack of faith. Jesus wept over their stubborn, self-inflicted blindness (Luke 19:41-44). He knew that the Pharisees and the scribes and the chief priests would incite the crowd to call for His blood. Crucify! Crucify Him! Time and time again, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit had sent prophet after prophet calling people to repentance, calling people to turn back to the truth, back to the worship life that God Himself had established, back to the Ten Commandments, back to loving God above all things and loving their neighbor as themselves, calling sinners back to God's grace. Those prophets were regularly rejected. "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not!" (Luke 13:34). You, the saints of Messiah Lutheran church, you are the *positive* embodiment of that divine desire. He has gathered you, in this place, in His name, baptized you into His death and resurrection and made you His own.

There is a breadline here. This breadline extends from the altar to the back of the nave. Sinners draw near to eat the Savior's body and drink the Savior's blood. When you stand in line for communion it is a symbol, a manifestation of strength and courage. Forgiveness, life, and salvation are what the Almighty gives us in this breadline. There is no fear in this place. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). Christ crucified is perfect love. Christ crucified and risen is our breadline. Perfect love is our breadline. Strength and courage come from this breadline. A healthy fear of God is cultivated in this place, but we fear nothing else. Ultimately, our citizenship is in heaven. We eagerly await our Savior who will come on the Last Day. Until that time we will gladly stand in His breadline and sing: "Blessed is He, blessed is He, blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord."