

Lent II Year C

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, How often have I desired to gather up your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings”

Over the past year or so Katharine and I have from time to time heard scuttling noises at night up in the attic. Once we had a squirrel who lived up there and it cost us about four hundred dollars to get rid of him. But this time we figured out that it was rats in the attic and out in the potting shed as well....so we called an exterminator recommended by a neighbor...his name is Paul, very solicitous, in an exterminator sort of way....And let me tell you he loves his job...he informed us that he was a third generation exterminator, had worked as one since he was a boy and his particular specialty was rats...you could just tell that he liked nothing more than to don a jumpsuit and crawl all under our house looking for possible clues as to how they might have found their way up into the attic....He began to speak eloquently in his South Alabama rustic accent at length about the habits of mice and rats...about their days and nights....their seasonal movements...their ethos...their *raison d'être*....Its a good thing we're talking about rats...we can catch them, he said...squirrels are too smart.

We went up finally into the attic, and Sherlock Holmes like he began to inspect the attic biosphere with artful precision....his concentration was rapt....Look here he said with an air of excitement....this is where they have been coming and going...You see, he said with authority, rats have oily skin and fur, and dirt sticks to them ...so when they travel they leave a trace of smudge...see, look at this PVC pipe...they've been travelling on it...see the smudges, I nodded...Well he strategically set traps, and said he'd come back in a few days...we've caught several so far...right where he had predicted.

Now Paul knows I'm a priest, and on his second visit, now that we had bonded, he felt emboldened to tell me his faith story...I get that a lot...it just comes with the trade....He finished by saying that he goes to Destination Church...asked me if I'd heard of it...I lied and said it sounded familiar....and he got all solemn looking and looked me in the eye and said, you know what I've learned...I didn't have a clue what to expect from this obviously kind man...I've learned, he said, that God has put us here for the lost of our world....You could have knocked me over with a feather. Now my definition of whom the lost might be probably is different from his; he might have said they are the ones who don't know Jesus; I might have said the lost were the victims of indignity, injustice and violence and poverty but we didn't get into that...I just nodded and agreed and agreed sincerely....

because when all is said and done... lost is lost, no matter the definition. We are sent for the good of the lost, he said, and to love them... wisdom to be sure, whether spoken by Jesus, the Dalai Lama, or spoken by a third generation exterminator from Mobile.

In Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Road*, A Man and his young son roam a decimated post apocalyptic landscape, the planet utterly ruined by nuclear holocaust, headed south to try to escape the cold of this world in perpetual winter. The boy is starving and his father is gravely ill. It is a very dark novel in which survival at any cost is the theme. At one point the young son sees another boy about his age wandering alone down an empty street haggard and gaunt... I'm sure the son sees himself mirrored in that boy, and such an image strikes fear into him... He asks his father, "what will happen to him", and his father answers... "Goodness will find him. It always does." Even at the end of the world, Love lives on... more wisdom.

Over the vast sweep of scripture, Hebrew scripture and New Testament literature alike, the theme is about being lost, and then the always imminent possibility of being found and liberated from lostness. You remember Israel was lost for forty years in the desert of Sinai... upon the establishment of the monarchy in Jerusalem, generations of kings systematically turned their backs to God's ways and to the people God loves. Jerusalem is of course the center of the Jewish universe, the place of the Temple in which God dwells and yet a city which fails time and again to be that holy city that God intends it to be. So Jerusalem becomes the symbol of all the lost... the corrupt powerful, the suffering poor, a ghetto of injustice, sacked over and over again by powers and principalities over its history... the prophets over the centuries averred that these calamities were God's punishment for Jerusalem's and therefore Israel's infidelity to the true way, their lostness... and therefore the world's lostness, because Israel was chosen by God according to the lore to be a light to the world... of course as we are told prophets get killed for saying such things.

In our passage today, Luke picks up on this theme. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, his life has been threatened already, and we know what will eventually befall him. But his ministry still continues, the dark cloud notwithstanding, bearing goodness along the way to Jerusalem. He stops and Laments for Jerusalem the archetypal lost city; but a city with whom still God is madly in Love.

That is the great paradox of faith, that amid the abject lostness of our world, no matter how squalid or wretched, God loves it still, and God continues to bear Good through God's people in spite of the worn and

broken ramparts of our lost cities, despite the violence and injustice that pervade them... God will love us to the end and beyond. God will persist as ever seeking God's lost people and God will find them and set them free... free from fear and despair and degradation and violence...and orient them towards home...Lost no longer.

Our work, dear people of God, is to embrace Jerusalem in our own day; Jerusalem the mirror upon which we see our own collective lostness; and the city whose potential is freedom and peace... our work is to love her like a mother loves her children...to tend to, to love our broken and our lost... We are called to love the world's brokenness, the world who still kills her prophets...A world smudged with evil...we are called to love the world's brokenness and therefore our own.....and know amid the struggle, for struggle it surely is, and surely will be... know amid the temptation to fear...know always that goodness will find us....goodness will find us all in God's good time...It always does.