

“Corralled Under the Wings of Word and Sacrament”
Luke 13:31-35

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The corralling of livestock is something that is all too familiar to us here in the great state of Texas. (Only 2 weeks in and one big Texas party and I’m already an expert! 😊). Everywhere you drive there are cattle roaming ranches and pastures, and at the end of each day, they are called and gathered into their corral, under the protection of the rancher or farmer who is responsible for their care. The protective fences and gates of the corral keep the predators and thieves away, making them safe as they await the day to come. But there are also often many strays, those who refuse to be brought into the corral at the call to come home, and they are subject to the terrors and dangers of the wild as they roam away from the safety of their fellow herdsmates.

In much the same way, in our text this morning, our Lord Jesus equates the lost people of Israel with chicks who refuse to be gathered under the wings of their mother. There is hope and safety under those wings, and yet they would rather roam at their own risk. They think they “know better” than the prophets of old, better than Isaiah, Jeremiah, and King David. They think that they know who the Messiah is supposed to be and what He is going to do, even though their understanding is not based in the Holy Word of God, but in their own traditions and false understandings. There is no secret for God’s people in how the Messiah is to gather His people and bring them under the protection of God’s grace. The formula is clearly laid out, and the Lord’s people will be corralled under the wings of Word and Sacrament for as long as they wait for the day of their exaltation to be with Christ in eternity.

That is what these lost people of Jerusalem, and the lost people in our world today are missing, both in and out of the church. The lost people outside of the church are wallowing in sin and living lives that condemn them to death because they are outside of Christ. The lost people in the church are playing an even more dangerous game. They are dancing in and out of the boat as the flood waters rise, and eventually the boat that is here to ferry them to eternal safety will be gone. They will fall victim to their willingness

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to dabble in sin as the Israelites did in the wilderness with the golden calf (Exodus 32), thinking that it will all be ok and they'll make it just fine without God for a little while. The problem with that is no one can truly "make it" through this life on their own, and in the life of faith for the Christian, God is the author and protector of that faith and they cannot hope to have any of it without Him. And if someone claims to belong to the Lord and wants to be safely under His wings, but they are openly doing things that are contrary to His Word and His command, then their salvation is in jeopardy.

The Lord seeks to save all mankind, to gather them under His wings and give them the forgiveness which He will win for them when He goes to the cross at Calvary. Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:4 that our loving God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." When the Holy Spirit gives us that verse, it is confirming that which our Lord has said in our text this morning. He wants none left out in the cold and dark of sin and eternal death. He does not want them thrown out into the utter darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And yet, the reality is that there will be some who are indeed cast out, but that casting out is by their own doing. Jesus seeks to protect the people of God from the dangers of sin and the fear of eternal death. He brings life and salvation, which these people in our Gospel lesson are rejecting out of hand. Despite the great efforts of our Lord, they choose sin over salvation, some knowingly and others ignorantly. The knowingly rejecting people are certainly far worse off. They are rejecting God Himself, a denial of the divinity of Christ and the salvation He has won. Their sin is one of contempt and idolatry, choosing themselves and their worldly understandings over that which has been proclaimed to them to be true by our Lord Jesus. In other words, they are committing what the writer to the Hebrews, and the Apostles John, and Peter, all identify as the sin against the Holy Spirit.

They are raging against the work of the Spirit to convert and bring people to the knowledge of Christ and Him crucified. We preach that truth because it is what brings people to faith. We do this so that all might do as Paul proclaims in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." These people that Jesus seeks to gather under His wings are choosing everything but that truth, because it is a truth that they can only know by the work of the Spirit whom they are rejecting. It is not a choice for them to make if they want to be in the corral of Christ,

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but their being outside of it is absolutely of their own doing, and that is made clear in the language of our text.

For those who reject the Lord's protection in ignorance, versus willful rejection, they must be called to repentance and need to know that they are saved by Christ and Him crucified. In the Lord's Great Commission to His disciples, He gives them very specific instructions. Despite the many "interpretations" that exist for that text, the truth of what is written is easily made out. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." This is His command to call people to faith, to call people to submit, by the work of the Holy Spirit, to the protection of Christ which is found in the teaching of the Word, and in the blessings of baptism and the Lord's Supper. And it is found there because Jesus, the very Son of God Himself has given those means the authority to grant that protection through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments.

So, what are we to do? Are we to roam around wondering if we are safely in the corral of our Great Shepherd, roaming the wild like a stray calf or a lost little chick? By no means! As those who have been called by the Gospel, and have been brought into the safety of Christ's bride, the Church, we stand firm in our faith knowing that He has our care well in hand. We are safely under the wings of our Lord and Savior who has stretched them out to cover every calamity that may befall us. And yet, calamity does still befall us from time to time, because we still live in this dying world of sin. The corruption of creation is a reality that we must live with until we reach the joy of heaven, and it is one that we prepare ourselves to do in the study of God's Word and the receiving of forgiveness in God's service to us.

Under the protection of our Lord's corral of Word and Sacrament, the Church is kept safe and protected from the wild predators of this world, and from the evil one who corrupts all things. Satan prowls like a roaring lion, as it says in 1 Peter 5:8, seeking to devour God's people and pull them down to the depths of hell. But the joke's on him, because as those who are gathered here, surrounded by the truth of Word and Sacrament, the very means of God's grace for His people, he cannot enter this corral. He has no power here, for we have the Word of God as our protection. As Paul says in Romans

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1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

That is why Jesus rebukes the people in our text the way in which He does. They are rejecting the truth of God’s Word and the protection that it brings. They are willing to subject themselves to the world around them and the devil’s prowling schemes rather than be brought to the knowledge of Christ and the salvation which He brings to all mankind. And their rejection of Him is not innocuous. It is eternally fatal. The Lord seeks to gather all men under his protective wings, and He does this by means of Word, water, and body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine. That is where He has promised to bring the forgiveness we need to be called righteous unto salvation.

And only by His great mercy will we accomplish this. Thanks be to God that we hold fast to the truth of Holy Scripture, and to the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. For in these means, Christ has instituted the protective barrier of faith in His people. And we stand firm in that faith, strengthened by His divine love and mercy that is brought to us in the forgiveness of sins He earned for us in His bloody death on the cross. The Church is not just a building to come to once or twice a week. It is where God’s people come, having been corralled under the wings of Word and Sacrament by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He calls us, and He brings us here, and by faith alone, we answer that call and receive His free gifts that He comes to bring to us. Amen.

May the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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