

In the name of him who loves you, who longs for you, who will come for you, dear Christian friends,

The young woman plopped herself onto the couch in my office in the dormitory. She wasn't sure if she wanted her fiancé to become her husband. She loved him and he loved her, but she was still worried. "I can be crazy. I'm worried I'm too much for him to handle." The employee was wondering the same thing. "I'm not good at my job," he said. "I don't think my company wants me." The student knows what that's like. After getting scolded once again, he wonders, "What's wrong with me?"

And in all three cases, those questions about their earthly problems can lead to questions about Jesus. "Does Jesus think there's something wrong with me?" "Does Jesus want me?" It's not hard for Christians to do. And it leads us to a troubling question: "Am I too much for Jesus to handle?" Today we get Jesus answer as he walks to Jerusalem where he knows he will die.

See Jesus' Determined Love. We'll see that

1. He knows and he goes.
2. We'll see His Tears.
3. And we'll see that He Appears.

This all happens in Perea, where Jesus was popular. But the Pharisees want to get him to Judea where he'll have fewer followers. Conveniently for them, Perea are ruled by Herod the Tetrarch; he's the one who killed John the Baptist. So the Pharisees team up with Herod's people against Jesus. They want him to stop doing miracles, stop getting more disciples, go away.

³¹ **At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."**

They played the ace up their sleeve, the Herod card. "Jesus this isn't about us. But HEROD wants you gone. Herod—why do I know that name? Oh yeah, he decapitated your cousin, John the Baptist. Sorry about that, but you better go." How do you think their plan worked?

³² **He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'**

Wow, Jesus. He called Herod a fox! He disrespected the trump card, and then he counted off the days of his journey. He's saying, "I know where I'll be today. I know where I'll be tomorrow. I know exactly when my quest ends, and there's nothing you know that I don't." Jesus knows his mission doesn't end with Herod's sword; it ends on a cross. He knows he will die, and if that doesn't scare our Savior, do you really think that you are too much for him to handle?

But Jesus isn't done. He says, ³³ **In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!** This is so cool. Jesus is playing with the word "go." The Pharisees

said, "**GO!** Because Herod wants to kill you." Jesus said, "No, you **GO!** And tell him I'm doing my plan. But I will **GO** to Jerusalem not to save my life... I'll **GO** to give up my life."

Jesus isn't scared of Herod; he's stronger than Herod. Jesus isn't fooled by Pharisees; he's smarter. This story is in the Bible to show us that Jesus knows exactly what he was doing. This story is so that we can see Jesus' determined love. He knows, and he goes. Friends, if being arrested, beaten and nailed to a cross didn't intimidate Jesus, do you really think you are too much to handle No.

So, he goes to Jerusalem. ³⁴ **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.**

The image of a hen gathering her chicks beneath her wings is one of the most moving pictures in the Bible. Apparently National Geographic magazine published a story about this. Allegedly there was a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park. After the blaze a forest ranger came upon the carcass of a bird petrified in ash. It wasn't pretty, so the ranger knocked apart the ashes with a stick, and three tiny chicks scurried out from under the ashes. The mother, when she saw the fire coming, chose not to fly to safety. She stayed with the chicks, gathered them beneath her wings and sacrificed herself so they could live. It's an amazing illustration of Jesus' love, the only problem is... it never happened. A Christian writer made it up to illustrate Jesus point, but I looked it up, and National Geographic never published a story like that and Yellowstone National Park has no record of it, because it never happened. And that's the point. It's a beautiful thought, that Jesus would sacrifice himself and Jerusalem would be saved, but it never happened. It's not that Jesus didn't want to. It's not that Jesus didn't sacrifice himself. But like Jesus said, "**Jerusalem... you were not willing.**"

That is one of the scariest sentences in the Bible because it teaches that Jesus' love can be resisted. He's not intimidated by Herod or fooled by Pharisees, but if someone chooses to walk away from Jesus, he will not force them to believe. That's what Jerusalem did so Jesus said, "**Look, your house is left to you desolate.**" The prophets left Jerusalem. The peace left Jerusalem, because they didn't want Jesus. This episode has been called Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. Jesus wants to save people. But sometimes they are not willing, and that makes Jesus sad. You see Jesus' love in his tears.

Jerusalem rejected Jesus by crucifying him. I don't think anybody in this room wants to crucify Jesus so the moral of this story isn't that we are just like Jerusalem. By God's grace, we're not! But it's a cautionary tale. One of Jesus' friends put it this way: "**These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us... So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.**" (1 Cor. 10:11-12)

Be careful, when you're tempted to ignore God's word. At Mount Olive we take that warning very seriously. When a Mount Olive member doesn't come hear Jesus' word for a long time, they get a letter in the mail which starts like this:

"Jesus says about the Jews who refused to listen to him, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers he chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."* Jesus has longed to gather you together with all of God's children. He has longed to tell you of his love for you, of his sacrifice for you, of his gracious will for your life. Jesus has fervently desired to feed your faith every week through his Word and sacrament. And yet, in spite of the Savior's desire to draw you close to himself and keep you a member of his family, it appears that you were not willing."

When someone prioritizes something over Jesus, they put their soul in danger of going to hell. But he is determined to love them. We see Jesus determined love when he appears. Jesus said, **"you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"** After Jerusalem rejected Jesus he appeared in Jerusalem, to die for their sins.

Diane was 16 and she got in a fight via text message. Who knows how it started, but Rebecca told Brittany Diane's secret, and now Brittany and Rebecca had a separate group chat that didn't include Diane. And she was so mad. After school mom stepped on an emotional landmine. Tears, an argument, and finally, "Mom, just leave me alone!" It didn't take that long locked in her room for Diane to regret it, and when she came downstairs her place at the dinner table was set with her favorite snack. Diane rejected mom, but even while she was mad, mom always loved her.

Jesus will let someone walk away from him, but he is determined to love them. That's why the letter we send to straying members includes this: "We stand ready to share God's love and forgiveness with you."

If you or someone you love has wandered away from Jesus, you need to know that you're never too far for Jesus to reach you. Jerusalem stoned prophets and Jesus wanted them. Jerusalem killed Jesus, yet where was the first place Jesus sent missionaries? Jerusalem! You see Jesus' love when he appears to the people who rejected him.

If this cautionary tale about Jerusalem has you worried, you need to hear this promise from Jesus. **"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28).**

So Jesus taught two things. (1) We can reject Jesus. Be careful that you don't fall from faith. But (2), Jesus keeps us safe in the faith. No one can snatch you out of his hand. They seem to say opposite things, so how can both be true? God didn't give us these teachings to make perfect logical sense. God gave us these teachings to bring us closer to Jesus. When we get cocky about our faith as if we don't need Jesus, we need to know that we could fall, so we rely on Jesus! But when we get

worried about losing our faith, we need to know that Jesus has us in his hand, so that we rely on Jesus! Both teachings point us to Jesus! That's how determined Jesus is to keep us focused on him.

That's what Jesus' quest to the cross was all about. He was determined to love us, and now he says, "follow me." We follow Jesus by knowing his love, and by showing his love. We know Jesus' love when we see what he did for us in his word. We show his love when we love others like he loved us.

Jesus loved us by dying on the cross for us. But you and I show love by treating people in our lives with kindness and respect. It's not flashy but it takes determination.

I saw a video in which people were asked one question: "If you could have dinner with anyone, dead or living, who would you choose?" The answers: Kim Kardashian, Justin Bieber, Nelson Mandela. Then they sat these people in front of a TV. The TV showed these people's children. The kids were asked the same question: "If you could have dinner with anyone, dead or living, who would you choose?" One kid said, "Does it have to be a celebrity? Well, then I'd pick my mommy and my daddy." One kid said, "My family all together!" Every kid gave the same answer. As the parents watched, many of them cried. To their kids, the most important people in the world are family. There is no one else in the world who can love your family like you can. What if you made a resolution to focus on Jesus every day until Easter and you were determined to share Jesus love with your family.

You will never make headlines for having dinner together. You won't get a trophy for driving your grandchildren around town. There's no award for respecting your brothers and sisters. You'll never get more popular for loving your parents. That kind of love makes a difference, and that kind of love takes determination. That kind of love starts with Jesus' love for us. That's why today, we see Jesus' determined love!

Amen.

In the friendship registers this week, you'll find some bookmark-sized slips of paper. Take one of those slips home with you, and write the name of the person or people you're planning to invite to Festival of Friendship on it. Then, put it somewhere visible-- like in your car, or on your bathroom mirror, so you can keep that person on your mind and in your prayers as you get ready to invite them to Festival of Friendship the weekend of March 31st!