

Thursday, March 25

Today's Reading: Matthew Chapter 23

Today's Devotional Message is by Pastor Don Moorman

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings but you wouldn't let me." Matt. 23: 38 (NLT)

In Matthew 23 Jesus really gets tough with the religious leaders of his day. He minces no words as he lambastes them for being show-offs and hypocrites, for valuing material things over spiritual things, for focusing on the small religious obligations while ignoring the great ones, and predicts their punishment in time and eternity. It sounds like Jesus is finally hitting back at those who had given him so much trouble throughout his ministry. It sounds like anger deteriorating into hatred.

But it isn't. Verse 38 puts everything into perspective. It's really love weeping because of frustration. Here Jesus compares his love for Jerusalem's religious leaders to the love of a mother hen for her chicks. A mother hen protects her chicks with her own body. When danger approaches she calls them, spreads her wings just slightly from her body and when they've all taken cover she closes her wings over them. Anyone who wants to get at her chicks has to come through her first. And she will die fighting anything trying to harm her chicks before she will flee.

Throughout his ministry Jesus had reached out to the religious leaders of his day. They rejected him but he kept reaching out to them. The more he extended himself to them the more absolutely they rejected him. Now, only days before he is to be crucified, he shows his frustration at how negatively they had responded. But the main theme is his great love even for those who had given him such heartache. Even at this point he has not rejected them. Had they opened themselves to him he would have gladly welcomed them into his protective presence.

It's good for us to remember how much Jesus loves all people, even those who break his heart. There are many evil people in our world who, if they persist in their evil, will face eternal judgment--but Jesus still loves them and weeps over their rejection of his forgiveness. So often, however, I hear Christians almost gleefully judging evil people and looking forward to the day they receive their punishment from God.

Regardless of how often we fail God, we rejoice in knowing that God will always forgive us when we come to him in sorrow and ask for his mercy. What we claim for ourselves we should affirm for others. God never gives up on people. Not on us, our friends, or even our worst enemies. His forgiveness always reaches out. The greatest saint isn't beyond the need of that forgiveness and the greatest sinner is not beyond its reach. The central message of Lent for us is that Jesus was willing to suffer everything, even death on the cross for us. The central message of Lent for the vilest people on the planet is that Jesus was willing to suffer everything, even death on the cross for them. As we accept this gift for ourselves let's become even more dedicated to sharing this gift with others.

Prayer: Jesus, as I feast on your forgiveness may I share it with others. Amen