

## *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem*

**Luke 13:31-35**

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At our previous church we made some major changes in the organization of our Board of Trustees. The by-laws said that the pastor served as president of the Board of Trustees. It was decided to shift that authority and responsibility to a member of the Board of Trustees who was not the pastor. It really wasn't a big deal. Four of us were meeting over a sandwich at an informal lunch meeting and the motion was moved, seconded, and approved, and poof, just like that I was no longer president. Easy come easy go.

It just so happened that on the day we made that decision, I had an appointment with my dentist to have some major dental work done. I was having a crown put on one of my teeth. So when the vote was taken that I should no longer be president of the Trustees, I let the group know I had to leave to go to the dentist. As I left I said in passing, "Since I am no longer president, I guess I'll go and get a crown."

Getting a crown on your tooth is not much of a coronation. In fact, it is so painful to get a crown that my dentist did me a favor. He shot me in the mouth...about ten times...with a sharp needle. And when he was done, I drooled and then mumbled through thick lips, "Sank you." Those shots numbed my mouth, so that when he revved up his tools and started drilling away, I didn't feel a thing. If you are going to get a crown, I highly recommend being completely numbed up.

Not Jesus. He has set his face toward Jerusalem. He is on his way to a coronation. As our passage this morning foreshadows, he will be greeted by shouts of, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." As the correlation of his fate with the prophets makes clear, Jesus also understands that death awaits him in Jerusalem. He will wear a crown and he will have a throne. But that crown and throne will only serve to literally drive home the point, "He was wounded for our transgressions." Though his coronation will be painful, Jesus refuses to be numb to the pain.

In fact, even though his death and resurrection are often referred to as the passion, his whole life was marked by passion. Jesus was not numb. Ever. He felt deeply not only his own pain, but also the pain of others. He endured the pangs of hunger and the attacks from Satan during his temptation. He reached out his hand, embracing the isolation and rejection of the leper. Matthew identifies Jesus with the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 by saying, "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases." He entered into the fray with demons, doing battle with the evil spirits. He went into the grief-filled home where Jairus' daughter lay dead on her bed. He had compassion on those 5,000 who were hungry. He wept at the tomb of Lazarus. When the religious leaders got indignant because Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath, he got indignant right back and called them hypocrites. We know what he did to the tables of the moneychangers when he came to the temple.

In this morning's text from Luke 13 Jesus has great sorrow for Jerusalem, saying he has longed to gather her children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but she was not willing. In Luke 19 Jesus will finally come to Jerusalem, and as he does he weeps over the city. Jesus is not numb. Ever. He is passionate. He feels the pain of a world gone awry.

It is not much of a stretch to see the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as an indictment of a people, the people of Israel, symbolized by Jerusalem, the city of the king, and by the temple, the house of the Lord. The indictment is that the people of God have become numb. Their lives are not passionate. To borrow on a phrase from a movie that came out years ago, Israel has become Numb and Number.

Jesus attacks that numbness in parables. A father had two sons. One of the sons took his inheritance and went to a distant land where he wasted it all on prostitutes and whores. Later he came home with his tail between his legs. Numb and Number know what to do. That younger son blew it. He got what he deserved. There is no way he should get to come home and still be a part of this family. You reap what you sow. Father, if you welcome him back, what kind of message are you sending

to the older brother, the one who stayed home all these years? You better practice tough love. Jesus is not Numb and Number. He is passionate. The Father pushes Numb and Number aside and rushes down the path to greet his son. He smothers him with love. He butchers the calf and calls for a party. What else could he do? That which was lost has been found! Jesus cuts through the numbness and calls forth passionate life.

A man gets mugged on his way to Jericho. Numb and Number walk by on the road. They are dressed up like real religious folks, with important duties to attend. They see the poor man beaten and left in a heap of hurt, and they scoot to the far side of the street. Not my problem. Not my responsibility. It happens every day. There is a bum on every corner. I have other priorities and obligations. It takes a Samaritan to bring some sanity to this situation, to bring some feeling, to bring some passion. He practically knocks Numb and Number out of the way to rush over to the poor man and help him, bandaging his wounds, taking him to an inn, and covering all the expenses. Jesus uses the passion of a Samaritan to cut through the numbness of life.

Numb and Number dress up in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. Right outside the gate of their house a beggar sits, covered with sores and longing to eat the scraps from the rich man's table. He is so low on the totem pole, even the dogs come and lick his sores. Numb and Number walk out that gate day after day and pretend like that beggar is a part of the landscape.

A crowd of 5,000 is hungry. Numb and Number want to send them away.

A tax collector gets a new lease on life and throws a party to celebrate, inviting all of his sinful friends. Numb and Number stand outside picketing the party.

A woman is bent over in pain, crippled for eighteen years. Numb and Number look at her and say, "It's the Sabbath. You have waited eighteen years. Can't you wait one more day? What is the big hurry?"

Numb and Number build gates and fences to protect their person and their property, to keep their blessings in and to keep others out. Jesus throws open his arms and says, “Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden.”

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. You have become Numb and Number. When the prophets came, trying to prod you out of your numbness and stir you from your slumber, you rejected their message. They cried out for justice, for mercy, for compassion, for kindness, for repentance, and you slept right through their sermons.

Jesus, you had better run. Herod wants to kill you.

Jesus sends a message to Herod. I will do what I came to do. I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.

Herod wants to kill Jesus. Jesus is not afraid. He is used to it. He gets killed every day.

It kills Jesus to see people rejected. It kills Jesus to see people suffer. It kills Jesus to hear the groans and the cries of the oppressed, the downtrodden, the brokenhearted, the lonely, and the lost. And it kills Jesus to see a world that is Numb and Number, a world that refuses to feel suffering or embrace pain, a world that ignores injustice and inequality.

God is not numb. Way back when his fiery voice spoke through the burning bush, he told Moses, “I have seen the misery of my people. I have heard them crying out. I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them.”

God is not numb. When he wrapped himself in human flesh, when he came as Jesus of Nazareth and walked the walk with us, he felt the pain. He experienced the sorrow. He touched the wounds and felt the salty sting of tears. He lived with passion.

When it came time for his coronation, right there in the middle of Jerusalem, when they gave him his crown, he wasn't numb. When that old fox Herod and that pompous Pilate and that Roman guard and that Jewish mob and that betraying Judas and that cowardly Peter and every one of us who has settled for playing the part of Numb and Number, all conspired to put him in to his misery, Jesus was not numb. He felt the pain. Indeed, he carried the pain, the wounds, the sorrows, the injustice, the oppression, and the heartbreak of this world. He died a passionate death, feeling every bit of the pain.

Today there is a casting call. The world wants to know if you will play the part of Numb and Number. Boy, if that is the only call available to us, we are in a world of hurt.

The good news of the gospel proclaims that Numb and Number is not the only call available. Jesus is calling. Surprisingly, he is inviting us to be in a world of hurt. He is inviting us to see the misery of people, to hear them crying out, and to be concerned about their sufferings.

The passion of Jesus includes his death. But it also includes his resurrection. Jesus told old Herod that on the third day he would reach his goal. His goal was not simply to die on the cross. His goal was to die on the cross so that in resurrection, God would bring new life to this numb world, so that God would call this dying world to live again, to feel again, to weep and to laugh, to give and to receive, to bear one another's burdens, and ultimately, to love and to be loved. And to do all of this passionately.

Numb and Number, your time is up. Go tell that old fox Herod, on the third day Jesus reached his goal. Life conquers death.

Note: I give credit to Walter Brueggemann for the idea of numbness, as described in *The Prophetic Imagination*.