

Strange, Isn't It?

“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, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Luke 13:34-35

We humans like to get together.

A couple of weeks ago I sent out an e-mail to 15 people. I wanted to think about how the Easter services for 2011 went. I also wanted to set a basic plan for Easter 2012. It is much more fun to do this with a group of people than alone. So I sent out the invitations.

Three people can come. 20% of the people invited will be there. This wasn't unexpected. All of us know that trying to get a group of people together on a particular night at a particular time is a real challenge. We all have so many things that we are a part of that we find it difficult to be a consistent part of anything. And when we try to get people to gather for something that we feel is important we are frustrated that other people have as many commitments as we do.

We humans like to get together. But we find it a very challenging thing to do.

This desire, unfulfilled, is something that we share with God. God like to get together with humans. Throughout the Bible we find a series of invitations which God has sent out to gather together with us.

In Genesis 12 he invites Abraham to go on a trip with him. "The Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed by you.'"

In Exodus 19 God wants to deepen the relationship with Abraham's descendants. He has just saved them from slavery in Egypt. Now he calls them to come closer to him. "Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, 'This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my commandments, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'"

But we humans did not keep the relationship. Things got so bad between us and God that we saw God as a threat. We went from apologetic explanations of why we could not attend, to leaving the invitations unopened, to throwing them away as soon as we saw them.

"Now Uriah son of Shemaiah from Kiriath Jearim was another man who prophesied in the name of the LORD; he prophesied the same things against this city and this land as Jeremiah did. When King Jehoiakim and all his officers and officials heard his words, the king sought to put him to death. But Uriah heard of it and fled in fear to Egypt. King Jehoiakim, however, sent Elnathan son of Akbor to Egypt, along with some other men. They brought Uriah out of Egypt and took him to King Jehoiakim, who had him struck down with a sword and his body thrown into the burial place of the common people. Jeremiah 26:20-23

God likes to get together with humans. But his desire, like ours, goes unfulfilled.

When a desire goes unfulfilled, we try to fulfill it in a different way. I can't get everyone together to work on Easter. So, how about letting those who can't make it answer some questions about Easter in their own time. As long as they get this information back to me before the meeting, I can take that information to the meeting. They can attend by proxy.

Surely that will work. So far two people have responded. I am up to 33%.

God wondered something similar. This relationship with Abram, developed through Moses' leadership, and continued by the prophets during the rule of the Israelite Kings, was not working. So, a different approach was needed.

"I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart

of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people and I will be their God."

Ezekiel 11:19-20

And so Jesus came.

"When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'"

Luke 3:21-22

God shared his Son, deeply loved, with us. He came to gather us around God. Surely, thought God, they can't refuse such an invitation.

But they did.

By the time we get to our passage the writing was on the wall. Jesus knew that he was going to suffer the same fate as the prophets before him.

"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, and you were not willing."

Luke 13:34

The longing would go unfulfilled. Jesus continues:

"Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Luke 13:35

Jesus would soon die rejected, on the cross, with the desire of God still unfulfilled. We humans would continue to desire to gather but find it very difficult to do.

Strange, isn't it? We have a common desire with God. We want to gather together with others. God wants to gather us together with others. And yet, human history shows that we can't pull it off. We can't get together for long without some type of violence, some type of corruption, some type of anger breaking out.

You see, this isn't just a Silverlake Church problem. We all have trouble getting together as co-workers, as friends and family. This isn't simply a "life in Los Angeles" problem. The Bible records stories told over thousands of years about our inability to commit to deep and lasting relationships with God and with each other. No, this has been a problem for humans for a very, very long time. And though we live in a consumer society who majors on fulfilling desires of all kinds, this desire goes unfulfilled. We still feel that tinge of loneliness in our hearts.

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