

**Bruton Parish Church  
February 28, 2010  
Second Sunday in Lent  
The Reverend Charles A. Robinson**

In the name of and for the Glory of God, Creator Redeemer, and Sustainer. †

In its context, the first sentence of today's Gospel reading actually says, "At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to (Jesus), "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." At that very hour...

It is reasonable to imagine that if we want to understand Jesus' response to a warning that is prefaced by such a phrase, we might want to know what was happening at that very hour.

Accordingly, I ask your indulgence as I take us back a few verses in Luke's Gospel and set the stage a bit. Beginning at Luke 13:22:

Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.<sup>23</sup> Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" He said to them,<sup>24</sup> "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.<sup>25</sup> When once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then in reply he will say to you, 'I do not know where you come from.'<sup>26</sup> Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'<sup>27</sup> But he will say, 'I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!'<sup>28</sup> There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out.<sup>29</sup> Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." At that very hour some Pharisees came...

Luke reports here that Jesus has resumed his journey to Jerusalem - a prophetic journey toward which he had "set his face" to fulfill his destiny. (Luke 9:51).

In the passage just read, Jesus offers a lengthy and somewhat enigmatic response to a direct question, "Lord, will only a few be saved?"

This has been from the beginning of human history and continues to be a question often asked amongst religious and non-religious people – who will be saved? Who will be rescued, liberated, kept from harm, healed, preserved - who will attain salvation?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 6284 σῶζω

σῶζω *rescue, liberate, keep from harm, heal, preserve*—1. *preserve or rescue* from natural dangers and afflictions—**a.** from death [Mt 14:30](#); [27:40](#), [42](#), [49](#); [Mk 13:20](#); [Lk 6:9](#); [9:24](#); [J 11:12](#); [Ac 27:20](#), [31](#).—**b.** *bring out safely* [J 12:27](#); [Hb 5:7](#); [Jd 5](#).—**c.** *free from disease or from demonic possession* [Mt 9:22](#); [Mk 5:23](#), [28](#),

**I submit that the real underlying question is: who is in and who is out? And more importantly how can I know that I am in and that those “others” are out.**

**I am very fond of a British comedy program made in the 1980s called “Bless me Father.” Some of you may have seen it broadcast over the years on public broadcasting. There are only 21 half-hour episodes, but I can watch them often because they are at the same time, warm, funny, tragic, and poignant.**

**The program is based upon a series of now out of print books written by Peter de Rosa under the pen name Neil Boyd. The stories are more or less true accounts of his own time spent in Curacy as a young Roman Catholic priest in 1950 and 1951 England at the Parish of St. Jude under the tutelage and guidance of his mentor, the curmudgeonly, and portly old Irish priest, Father Charles Duggleswell.**

**In the final episode, distressing word has arrived at the door of the Mother Superior of the local convent, Mother Stephen, and she comes to call upon Father Duggleswell to inform him. She tells him that Christine Hammond, a favored and lovely young girl who has grown up in the orphanage, wishes to marry a Jewish boy, the son of Rabbi Emmanuel Rosen. Stunned, he exclaims with great passion, “Never! It’s impossible! And in a tirade he says, “The Jews have this extraordinary idea that they are the chosen people!” To which the Mother Superior then replies, “When it is quite clear we are.”**

**It is an amusing moment and the writer intends to illustrate the pomposity and presumption that exists in such an exchange, but it is also based upon a long standing, and strongly held belief in an absolute truth upon both sides.**

**When Jesus answers the question by saying, “strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able,” he makes a statement that has been grossly misused throughout the history of the church to support the premise found in the exchange between Father Duggleswell and Mother Stephen.**

**Jesus states that many who ate with him and drank with him and sat under his teaching would be unable to enter this narrow way and that instead there would be people from all directions – east, west, north, south to eat in the Kingdom of God.**

**The traditional suggestion is that this is an allusion to what is called super-secessionism - that god is shifting a favored status from the people of Israel and to the gentile people that will come from the four corners of the Earth and will constitute the Church – the new chosen of God – the new insiders.**

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**34; 10:52; [Lk 8:48](#), [50](#); [17:19](#); [18:42](#); [Ac 4:9](#); [14:9](#); [Js 5:15](#).—2. *rescue or preserve from eternal death, from judgment, sin, bring salvation, bring to salvation*—a. act. [Mt 18:11](#); [Lk 7:50](#) ; [J 12:47](#); [Ro 11:14](#); [1 Cor 1:21](#); [7:16](#); [Tit 3:5](#); [Hb 7:25](#); [Js 4:12](#); [5:20](#); [1 Pt 3:21](#).—b. pass. *be rescued or saved, attain salvation* [Mt 24:13](#); [Mk 10:26](#); [Lk 13:23](#); [18:26](#); [J 3:17](#); [5:34](#); [Ac 11:14](#); [15:1](#), [11](#); [Ro 8:24](#); [11:26](#); [1 Cor. 3:15](#); [5:5](#); [Eph 2:5](#), [8](#); [1 Ti 2:4](#) .—3. Certain passages belong under 1 and 2 at the same time [Mk 8:35](#); [Lk 9:24](#); [9:56](#) v.l.; [Ro 9:27](#). [pg 195]**

**This suggestion has been further supported by Jesus' closing words in this Gospel reading:**

**“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing?”**

**The idea being that Jesus is setting aside Jerusalem after trying in vain to reach them and that the gift of his grace is to shift to a not yet identified group of chosen ones from the reaches of Earth.**

**If we carefully read this passage and consider it within its context and with other similar writings, it is hard to come to such an exclusionary conclusion.**

**Firstly, after pleading with a metaphorical Jerusalem (the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! [there have been many such places] and describing himself as a mother hen drawing in her brood for protection, Jesus finally says, “...you will not see me until the time comes when you say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the lord.” There is no suggestion that anyone is being set aside.**

**More importantly, is what he says about the ones who will come and eat in the kingdom of God from the many directions. He says, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.” He also says of the ones who make great claims for having ate and drank with him, and having him teach in their streets – “I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!” And he says there will weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**

**These are harsh words, but they are also reminiscent of the words that Matthew attributes to Jesus when he uses the metaphor of separating the sheep from the goats. I believe this passage intends to communicate the same point.**

**In Matthew, Jesus is teaching that the least, the marginalized, the set aside - the prisoner, the hospital patient, the hungry or thirsty person, the one in need of clothing is the residence of Christ and it is those that find him there that will be the sheep who find a welcome place. Those who do not will be among the goats who do not find a welcome place.**

**This is not about being chosen as a nation or a people because of some arbitrary historical replacement theology. This is once again about how we then live. How are we with one another and how far do we extend the “one another?”**

**Contrary to being about exclusion – I believe it is about inclusion – our inclusion! Will we be those who are willing and who say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”**

**The plea of Jesus to Jerusalem is a plea to all of humanity.**

**Allow me the liberty to paraphrase those words:**

**Gathered people of God, gathered in Jerusalem, in London, in New York, in Los Angeles, in Tehran, Baghdad, Capetown, in Mobile, Denver, Moscow, in Beijing, and in multitude of**

**towns and hamlets of the world – in Williamsburg. The cities that kill the prophets and stones the messengers of truth! How often have I desired to gather you as any mother in the wild would do, to protect, to instruct, to prepare, but you are often not willing! You will not see me until the time comes when you recognize me and say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” Come find me in the unlikely place and love me there, eat with me there, hear my teaching there with all of those who have come from the farthest reaches in search of their God. Be willing!**

**The need is great, the laborers are few. We are to be about our divine parent’s business – the business of bringing Gospel life to all of humanity wherever we encounter them. That is the life of the Gospel. Be willing!**

**Because the chosen are the willing!**

**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!**