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Jesus has something to show us in today's Gospel, and something to tell us. This isn't unusual – Jesus often has things to show and tell us, but very often they're the same thing. For example, he both tells us to care for the poor, and shows us how to do it by his example.

The passage starts out with the Pharisees doing a very un-pharisaic thing – warning Jesus that he is in danger. Usually, the Pharisees are the ones PUTTING Jesus in danger, not warning him of it. Luke not only mentions the Pharisees more often than the other Gospels do, his portrayal of the Jewish leadership is much more complex and nuanced than in the other Gospel accounts. For instance, Luke tells about Jesus being invited to Pharisees' houses for dinner three times; yet, his condemnation of what one commentator calls their "moral darkness" is obvious.

In our passage today, a group of Pharisees meet Jesus to warn him that Herod wants to kill him. It's not clear what their motivation is in telling Jesus this, nor is Jesus' response to them clear. "Go and tell that fox for me" could mean that Jesus assumes the Pharisees are in cahoots with Herod OR that he is joining the Pharisees in condemning Herod as a Roman collaborator. Luke is too good of a writer to make it simple for us.

But what Jesus is showing us by his actions IS clear. Cure people of their illnesses and cast out demons, his example tells us, or in other words, spread the Gospel, even in the face of opposition from the highest levels. Stand up to secular, and even religious, authorities if you need to, in order to do God's work.

He talks about doing this today and tomorrow, and on the third day finishing his work, or, in another way of putting it, achieving his goal. This is clearly a reference to Jesus' crucifixion and to doing this holy work right up to the Cross. And since he says in Chapter 9, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me," our goal, too, is to spread the Gospel with our lives if necessary.

Luckily, most of us will never have to do this. We live in a country where we have freedom of religion. We aren't risking our lives on a daily basis to spread the Gospel message, or to do God's work, as some people do in China or in parts of Africa.

So why don’t we? What's preventing us? Are we afraid? Or is it merely apathy or weariness, or some combination of all three? I don't know the answer to that question, though it's one I ask myself a lot.

Which brings us to what Jesus is telling us in this passage. We can't tell from the text if Jesus is saying the next part to the Pharisees, or if he shooed them off to run back to Herod and is saying it to himself, or to his disciples. Literarily and dramatically, it has the feeling of a soliloquy. Jesus is practical, and almost snappish to the Pharisees, but then his mood changes and he seems more melancholy than annoyed.

"How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" This maternal image is very powerful. Those of you who are parents, and even those of us who aren't, have almost certainly experienced wanting to hug a child who doesn't want to be hugged at that moment. They're incredibly strong and seem to defy physics and even gravity in their desire to get away.

This is what Jesus means when he says that Jerusalem, and by Jerusalem he means the Jews, wasn't willing. It's not that they were merely indifferent. They also actively rejected Jesus and his followers. If we remember that the Gospel of Luke is Part One of the two-part work, Luke-Acts, and the book of Acts, especially, is about spreading the Gospel to the Gentiles, this makes sense.

Unfortunately, the NRSV translation waters down the next line, "See, your house is left to you." The word for "left to you," – *apheimi* – can also be translated as "abandoned" or "desolate." Luke was most likely written after the destruction of the temple, so the idea of an abandoned Jerusalem would hit home.

So what is Jesus saying to US here? And what does it have to do with what he's showing us in the previous section?

We live in a country where there is supposed to be religious tolerance. However, we also live in a time of increased secularization of our society, and a time where both apathy and antipathy towards religion are growing. Part of this is a reaction fueled by religious zealots – people for whom anything outside of their own narrow view of God is intolerable.

But part of it is fueled by our own indifference. We do religion only on Sunday, and not even every Sunday. We are unwilling to follow Jesus to the Cross – not because it's dangerous, but because it's inconvenient or embarrassing.

God will not abandon us, just as he hasn't abandoned the Jewish people. But our churches – our temples – are being abandoned at a great rate. Why should anyone go somewhere where people are indifferent? If you're looking for a restaurant in New York, for instance, you go to one of the many restaurant review sites and look at customer reviews. If those reviews are tepid, like as not you won't go to that restaurant.

It's the same with God. If our reviews of God are tepid, as demonstrated by our behavior and our speech, why should anyone new try God out or why should someone who's been hurt by religion try it out again just because it's under new management? If we, who profess Christ crucified, and who say the Nicene Creed every Sunday, can't work up any enthusiasm the rest of the week, how can we expect to grow.

I don't expect our churches to be destroyed anytime soon like the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. But in some ways, nothing is sadder than a structure that has been abandoned and left to molder.

Several years ago, Michael and I spent some time in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan looking at old railroad installations. One of the places we visited was the site of the Kingsford plant near Iron Mountain. The plant was started by the Ford Motor Company to make wooden panes for their wood-sided station wagons.

Then it was converted to make Waco gliders in World War II. After World War II, when gliders were no longer needed and wood-sided cars were out of fashion, the plant was converted yet again, this time to make charcoal briquettes. It was abandoned in 1961, but not torn down.

It's kind of creepy to drive through what was once a huge, thriving business, and see nothing but empty buildings with their doors ajar and their windows knocked out by vandals or weather. You can see what it used to be, by what it isn't now.

We can't let that happen to us. Rather than abandon our churches by our indifference, we need to transform them by the Gospel. We need to do what Jesus tells us – go out and cure the sick and cast out demons in his name. Now, we don't see a lot of demon possession these days, especially in Huron, and in this day of modern medicine, curing the sick may take on a different meaning.

But there are plenty of people out there who are battling demons of alcoholism and drug addiction, demons of poverty, anger, and hatred. And there are plenty of people out there who are sick at heart – lonely, frightened, and sad – as well as people who are dealing with chronic or devastating illness that medicine can't treat.

Our work is far from done, and it starts here. Show up. Bring friends. We have lots of offerings during Lent for you to try – Bible study, soup suppers, Stations of the Cross. Spread the word, and show people by your actions that here – right here at Grace Church in Huron, South Dakota – is where the love of God can be found in abundance, and here is where the Gospel of Christ is lived out daily.