

When America Sneezes . . .

Luke 13:31-35

When America sneezes . . . the world catches a cold.

I guess that's why I can't turn on the news without hearing something about what's going on in the United States, which, it seems is still the centre of the universe.

Just a couple of weeks ago the 47th president of the United States of America made an historic speech to the US Congress . . . historic in that it was so long! I didn't listen to all of it, but I want to share just a snippet with you this morning . . . a snippet I think that captures the whole . . .

The president said: "This will be our greatest era. With God's help . . . we are going to lead this nation even higher. We are going to forge the free-est, most advanced, most dynamic and most dominant civilisation ever to exist on the face of the earth . . . through it all, we are going to rediscover the unstoppable power of the American spirit, and we are going to renew unlimited promise of the American dream. Every day we will stand up and we will fight, fight, fight for our country our citizens believe in and our people deserve. Get ready for an incredible future, because the golden age of America has only just begun. It will be like nothing that has ever been seen before."

They're the words of the president of the United States . . . many think he's the Messiah, many more think he's the devil incarnate. Scarily, I think he might be both! Whatever the case, it's hard to look away, isn't it?

When America sneezes, Australia catches a cold.

Including us . . . this little random bunch of Lutherans sitting in church on a Sunday morning. . . we've got no political clout . . . certainly not in the US . . . but, still, we're drawn into the gravitational pull around the centre of the universe. Think what you will about the American president, but he might just make America great again. And, if he does many doubters will have to eat humble pie. I'm sure a great swathe of Americans are hoping he does. And, maybe not a few Australians are quietly watching and hoping . . . well, maybe if we follow the same path *Australia* could be great again too? And, who of us isn't stirred by the thought of being great . . . whatever that might mean for us . . . you only have to know which buttons to push to discover the little dictator in each of us!

When America sneezes the whole world catches a cold.

There were three words in that speech that caught my ear . . . I wonder if they caught yours? Three words that make what the president's said particularly relevant to the world . . . and to us. Three words that he probably didn't even think about when he said them. Those three words were: 'with God's help'. The president said, "*With God's help* we are going to lead this nation even higher".

Now, assuming he believes what he says, who is this God the president refers to? Who is this God the president so confidently invokes? Who is this God that will help make American great again? Or Australia? Or the church? Or me? Or you? Who is this God? Is it the God we meet in the Bible? Because if it is, then we're talking about a man named Jesus . . . is that the God we're talking about? .

. . . is that the God we're expecting to help us with our schemes and plans and life. Because if it is, then at this moment *that* God is lamenting over Jerusalem. When I say 'this moment' I mean this moment in the story from Luke's Gospel . . . but I also think it is happening today too . . . Jesus is lamenting over Jerusalem. You see, Jerusalem was the centre of Jesus' universe . . . and Jesus' heart is breaking because of her . . . breaking *for* her. Jesus has hopes for Jerusalem. Jesus has dreams for Jerusalem. And the people of Jerusalem sure longed to be great again! And, if Jesus is the Messiah surely he's the one to make it happen!

But what image does Jesus use to describe himself . . . to describe God? He could have chosen any number of animals from the Scriptures as he knew them . . . the lion of Judah . . . proud and fierce. Or, the mighty eagle of Exodus, or even the powerful leopard described by Hosea. But, no, Jesus chooses none of those. Instead, Jesus chooses a chicken!

I wonder if that's the God the president of the United States had in mind when he made his speech to congress . . . God who is like a chicken? A mother hen? A hen has no teeth . . . no claws . . . no bulging muscles. A hen is vulnerable . . . defenseless. And this is the way Jesus describes himself . . . this is the way Jesus describes God! A God who won't force Jerusalem to come to him. A God who can only lament.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing".

A vulnerable, defenseless God? I wonder if that's who the president had in mind to help make America great again? I wonder if that's who we have in mind when we call on God for help? Perhaps that's why so many are unwilling? Unwilling to shelter under God's wings? Unwilling to trust in a vulnerable God. What we want is a lion . . . a bald eagle . . . a champion! Not a chicken.

And yet, this is how God is . . . this is *who* God is . . . he doesn't force anyone into his kingdom . . . he doesn't force anyone *out* of his kingdom. And, he doesn't have a campaign slogan: Lutherans First . . . or, Good People First. No, he opens his arms wide . . . as wide as possible . . . to embrace every one of his children. And, like a mother hen God will do anything for his children, including dying for them . . . giving his life for them, so that they might live . . . so they might live and grow up to be like him: vulnerable . . . caring . . . loving . . . nurturing . . . self-sacrificing people . . . just like Jesus.

Just like Jesus.

When Jesus heard that the fox was after him . . . that Herod wanted him dead, Jesus shrugged as if to say, "Herod will do what Herod does . . . Herod will be who Herod is . . . and I will do what I do and I will be who I am . . . a mother hen . . . caring, healing, serving, forgiving and, most of all . . . not living for myself . . . not for my own sake, but living for the sake of others . . . giving my life for my chicks."

Donald Trump may well make America great again, and he doesn't need God's help to do that. Empires rise and empires fall. But *God's* kingdom lasts forever. God's kingdom where the first are last and the last are first. God's kingdom where the humble are exalted and the exalted humbled. God's kingdom where everyone's welcome . . . where everyone is valued . . . where everyone is called.

When America sneezes the world catches a cold. But, there's a cure for that. Under the shelter of the mother hen's wings there is healing . . . and with healing comes a new way to live . . . a different way to live . . . a Jesus kind of way to live.

Are you willing?

Amen.

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