

SECOND READING: Luke 13:31-35

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³¹ At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." ³² He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³ Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' ³⁴ 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! ³⁵ See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

FIRST READING: Psalm 27

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The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh—my adversaries and foes—they shall stumble and fall.

3 Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

4 One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

5 For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

6 Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

7 Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! 8 "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek. 9 Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

10 If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.

11 Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

14 Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

“Bound for Jerusalem”

The airline stewardess, in as pleasant but yet commanding voice as possible, said, *“The cabin doors will soon be closing. Please take your seats. The cabin doors will soon be closing. Please clear the aisles. The cabin doors will soon be closing and the jetway will be pulling away from the plane. No further movement on or off the airline will be possible. At this time, seatbacks and tray tables must be in their full upright and locked positions, and all baggage must be stowed in the overhead compartments or completely under the seats in front of you.”* And then, there it was again. This time, very clear...*“The Cabin doors will soon be closing! We ARE bound for NYC.”*

Well, these words were still ringing in my ears when I began to study this week’s lectionary text partly because I had just recently heard them, but also because behind the text from Luke 13 that we read this morning is the verse from Luke 9 *“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem”*(Lk 9:51).(repeat) Jesus was bound for Jerusalem. Nothing was deterring Jesus from going there. Nothing. At. All.¹ There was no turning back. He desired to gather his children as a hen gathers her chicks beneath her wings, and even a death threat from Herod was not stopping him. We are going to give this thought today, but before we do, let’s remember how Jesus got to this point.

In the beginning he was bound in the opposite direction. After his baptism, he was tempted in the wilderness and then he began his ministry, going from place to place, preaching and teaching the good news of God’s love and saving grace, but always what he did he did rather quietly. He kept all of his work somewhat under wraps. Sure, people were coming to know about him and crowds were gathering everywhere as he performed healings and other miracles in places like Capernaum, Cana, Nazareth, Tyre and Sidon, and as he made his way all the way North into Gentile territories of Caesarea/Philippi. But always he stayed just out of reach of the religious officials and told his disciples to not let others know what he was up to. But then right before his Transfiguration he asked them, *“Who do you say that I am?”* and if you recall, Peter

¹ Karoline Lewis, *“Determination”*. <http://workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?pst=5295>. (accessed 3/13/2019).

answered him saying, “*You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.*” (Lk 9:18-20) And, at this point...once he knew that they knew who he was, he turned around and set his face toward Jerusalem. He set his face, and his disciples’ with him, toward the place of sackcloth and ashes.² He set his face toward the cross.

On the journey, just as the pilots prepared us in flight with what the temperature and ground conditions of NYC would be, Jesus prepared his followers, telling them that he was going to Jerusalem to die. He told them what embarking on this journey with him would mean. They would need to deny themselves and to take up their own crosses. If they were going to be his followers, they’d have to be prepared to die with him! “*The paradox was,*” he explained, “*that IF they would save their lives, they’d lose them anyway, but if they’d give their lives away, for his sake, they’d save them.*” “*Life,*” he told them, “*was like love. Save it and it dries up and disappears. Give it away in loving others and it comes back in buckets and buckets, full and over-flowing.*” They were being invited to walk with him and live the only life that is worth living, a life which would love and yes, likely love unto death, but paradoxically a life that would also then lead to life!³ Life to death to Life. Life to death to GLORY! How powerful are the verses of the hymn we will close with today. The fourth verse of “*Lift High the Cross*”... “*O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree, your death has brought us life eternally!*”

So, back to the place of our text, nothing was going to stop Jesus. “*Go and tell that fox for me...*” he told the Pharisees who were warning him that Herod was out to kill him. Jesus was bound for Jerusalem! The question for us today is whether we will go with him, whether we will deny ourselves, pick up our crosses, and be ready if need be to die with Jesus? If you are like me, you’ve answered this question before with a “Yes”, “oh, yes, Jesus” Likely you wouldn’t be here this morning if you hadn’t. But yet, if you are like me, you also have found yourself off course in the journey at times. It’s a hard task...denying our self-interests, giving of our everything, being willing to give even our lives for love of neighbor, to do Jesus’ work in

² Jim Somerville. “C13 The Second Sunday of Lent” <https://asermonforeverysunday.com/> (accessed 3/13/19).

³ Jim Somerville.

the world. At times we've backed away from caring for others who are hard to love or given in to excuses which eat away at our determination or resolve...right?

I've been thinking about the things or situations which tend to do this, which cause us to lose our focus at least temporarily....things like a life event that is so sudden and shattering that we are completely disoriented, which so immobilize us that we panic and until our panic settles down and we regain perspective, we lay down our crosses, think only of ourselves and can't begin to determine where to go. *I have heard that during the spring in Scotland, especially in Eastern areas bordering the North Sea, there frequently occurs what are known as haars. A haar is a dense coastal fog, a heavy, heavy mist. I have a friend who studied in Scotland and describes having been caught in one when he once took a bike ride. It came in he said, so quickly, that he didn't have any opportunity to escape. It overtook and enveloped him causing him to become completely disoriented. Not being able to see and find his bearings, he couldn't move forward, backwards or to the side. There appeared to him to be no way out. The more he spun around, the more overwhelmed he became. He describes letting go of his bike, feeling isolated, cold and suddenly aware of the eerie silence and a banging in his chest. The silence, he said, was impenetrable, except, except for the ...distant bleating of sheep.*

I agree with Karoline Lewis of Luther Seminary, that most times, the obstacles to our walking THE WAY are of our own making, obstacles such as self-doubt and self-sabotage. To be the follower we need to be we have to do and to keep doing a good bit of self-evaluation and inner reflection. Self-evaluation and inner reflection mean that change is inherent and anything with change in it, especially in regard to ourselves, is just scary and hard (i.e. changing responsibilities, changing relationships, changing identity). It takes a lot of energy, humility, owning up, and surrendering.⁴ It's hard. It's scary.

Another reason...sadly, sometimes, we get off course because we CHOOSE a way that is simply contrary to the way of God. We frankly sin. It's a temptation there in all of us fallen creatures. *There is this story about a scorpion who, being a very poor swimmer, asked a turtle*

⁴ Karoline Lewis.

*to carry him on its back across the river. "Are you mad?" exclaimed the turtle. "You'll sting me while I am swimming and I'll drown." "My dear turtle, "laughed the scorpion, "If I were to sting you, you would drown and I'd go down with you. Now where is the logic in that?" "You're right," cried the turtle. "Hop on." The scorpion climbed aboard and halfway across the river gave the turtle a mighty sting. As they both sank to the bottom, the turtle, resigned, said, "Do you mind if I ask you something? You said there is no logic in your stinging me. Why did you do it?" "It has nothing to do with logic," the drowning scorpion replied. "It's just in my character."*⁵ The leaders in Jerusalem freely chose what was in their character...they **CHOSE** the way contrary to the way of God. **THEY** didn't have to choose it, (they're not scorpions but humans with free will), yet they did anyway. In Matthew's gospel, it says that Jesus wept as he said, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!"* Jerusalem had a long history of rebelling against God, refusing to care for the widows and orphans, for the poor and the stranger in the land. Prophet after prophet God sent to warn the leaders that their arrogance and outright rebellion against God would open the way for enemy attack. The only way for them to avoid the destruction which now threatened them was to welcome Jesus, but all the signs were that they would not.⁶

Whatever the cause, when we can't find our way, when we choose the wrong way, when our feet slip, when the cross just is too heavy, when we get off track, there is something we can remember, something I find very comforting... and that is that Jesus didn't. Jesus didn't get off track. He was bound to Jerusalem and to Jerusalem he went. He gave of himself totally, even unto death. "Well," you might say, *"of course, he could, he was the Son of God,"* but he was also human, and it seems to me that Jesus' "human determination and successful determination validates, underscores and empowers our own"⁷. And the fact that his living presence is with us now to make the sheep in the distance bleat the right direction for us, allows us to say with the psalmist, *"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"*

⁵Mirza Charles Iliya Krempeaux. <http://changelog.ca/topic/The%20Scorpion%20and%20the%20Turtle>. (accessed 3/15/19).

⁶Tom Wright. *Luke for Everyone*. (Louisville: WJKP; 2001,4)173.

⁷Karoline Lewis

Jesus said, “*Jerusalem, how I have DESIRED to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings*” With great feeling, great longing, Jesus seeks to gather us to himself, to bring us close, to hold us, to shelter us, to keep us...forever. He wants an intimate relationship with us. He is not a punitive, condemning God who is disinterested, far away and removed. HIS is the relationship that rings throughout all of Scripture, from the beginning when we’re told we are made in God’s image, to the covenant of love made with Abraham and Sarah, to the crazy love of a shepherd looking for the one lost sheep, to the sharing of the bread and cup at the Last Supper.⁸ *How I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.* Jesus’s vulnerable, selfless, sacrificial love will encourage us when our resolve wanes, his example will strengthen our feet when they slip, he will give us a shoulder when our crosses get too heavy. He has gone before us. He knows the way. He IS the way.

Friends, the cabin doors have shut. Hold on. Clear the aisles. WE ARE BOUND FOR GLORY. Amen.

⁸ John Wurster. *The Presbyterian Outlook*. <https://pres-outlook.org/2019/03/2nd-sunday-in-lent-march-17-2019/> (accessed 10/14/19).