

March 20, 2022 - 2nd Sunday of Lent - sermon notes

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35

Our journey toward Easter began with the startling news of Russia's invasion of Ukraine which has brought about a humanitarian crisis that has also spilled into the economic portion of our lives. While that is happening, and our hearts are broken on behalf of our brothers and sisters in the midst of the conflict, we have begun the 3rd year of dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. The vaccines have been a tremendous help but the disease is still out of control in many places and the number of people in hospital here in the Sudbury area does not seem to be decreasing very quickly. The scientists who have advised us throughout this pandemic are asking us to recognize that when the pandemic conditions end the virus won't disappear but will then become endemic. (Which means it is regularly found within the population). With these, and other events in our lives we may be tempted to lose hope in the future but Easter is the ultimate message from God that there is always hope. The somber tones of Lent become songs of rejoicing when Jesus is raised from the dead to rule and reign forever. The suffering and pain of this life is redeemed by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross and new life is proclaimed to all who will hear. The main source of information about this new hope is found in our scriptures so let us turn our attention to one of the passages offered for this Sunday.

The 13th chapter of Luke is almost exactly in the middle of Luke's account of Jesus 'turning his face to Jerusalem'. You may recall that shortly after the disciples, through Peter, proclaimed him to be the Messiah of God we are told that "when the days drew near for him to be taken up, he [Jesus] set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51) This decision meant a journey from Galilee, where he had been ministering, through the towns and villages of Palestine. According to Luke he went first to a town of the Samaritans who learned that he was determined to travel to Jerusalem and they rejected his ministry because of that. It was during this journey that he sent 70 of his disciples ahead of him to 'say to them, the kingdom of God has come near to you while they cured their ill.' When we meet Jesus in the passage from Luke 13:31-35 he had been teaching about aspects of the kingdom and the time of final judgement. Among the crowd who had been listening to him teach were some Pharisees who urged him to leave the village because, they said, 'Herod wants to kill you.' There is no real way to know whether this was a sincere warning or a ploy to get Jesus to move along but I am much more interested in Jesus' response. First, he faced the threat with some disdain by calling Herod a 'fox' and declaring that his work was not going to be interrupted by anyone before he got to Jerusalem. Part of his work was to die on the cross and over and over again in this portion of Luke's Gospel Jesus makes

reference to that part of his work. In declaring that the 'kingdom of God has come near you' Jesus meant to open the door of heaven to all believers by dying for our sins. And so Jesus declares that he will continue to perform cures and cast out demons as he continues to travel to Jerusalem as he had set out to do.

There is an irony to the fact that Jerusalem was called 'the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!' because Jerusalem was also known for the fact that the location God's Temple was in this city - high on a hill. It would seem that when the light of God began to expose corruption or sin the people of Jerusalem would rather kill the messenger than turn their lives around. Jesus wanted to gather the people of Jerusalem (and all of Judea) and love them but they were not interested. The image of a hen gathering her chicks as God's desire is a compelling image of love and protection but, as Jesus observed, the people of Jerusalem were not interested. We know from the scriptural account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and his subsequent death on a cross that their rejection was taken to the extreme in Jesus' case. This is a troubling reality but we may wonder what it has to say to us.

What I hear Jesus saying to me through this passage is that obstacles and threats should not be allowed to prevent the work that God has given us to do from being done. No matter the threat Jesus 'set his face to Jerusalem' and this encourages me to try to have the same determination in the face of obstacles that come into my path. Jesus once said that he wanted disciples who would not get distracted or discouraged because the work they were called to do was very important. Jesus certainly had a clear idea of what he had been called to do which continually encourages me to ask God to help me discern what I have been called to do in this particular season.

I also hear Jesus saying to me that there may be the pain of rejection felt as we follow the path of God - rejection from those we most love. I don't like to think of this but I have experienced it. Perhaps because of something I've done or haven't done there are people who I care about who do not receive any ministry from me because of their choice. I offer but it is rejected. I don't think my life is unique in this area and this certainly happened to Jesus so the life of a disciple must include this reality. As Jesus looked with love at Jerusalem he acknowledged the sorrow he felt and continued to walk toward the cross which was the ultimate message of love and grace. From this series of events I learn that at times Jesus' disciples have to grieve over the choices others make while continuing to love and minister.

We cannot escape the problems of our society by moving into isolation or hiding our heads

and waiting for it all to be over as tempting as that may be. As people of God who are called salt and light we are meant to be in the midst of the mess while offering ourselves in service to God and bringing light into the situation as best as we are able. Rest from our labours will come but not while we are breathing. The unique challenges we have been facing for the past two years and the challenges that will come as we move from pandemic to endemic conditions are not an aberration because life is always going to be filled with challenges. Our task, like Jesus, is to identify as best we can, our mission and stick to it through thick and thin. As we do we are encouraged to remember that we are not alone in our task - our brothers and sisters are alongside - and the Holy Spirit of God has been promised to us in order to bring the presence of Jesus into our lives. Our fatigue caused by our need to adapt our lives in combating this virus while navigating through all the rest of our lives is understandable and we need to get what rest we need. At the same time, to quote Jesus, 'the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few' and so God needs all hands to continue the work of inviting others to come into the household of God where they will find the source of all their joys and hopes.

The season of Lent brings us into a time where contemplating our lives as disciples of Jesus can have a greater focus. I pray that as we meditate on the gospel reading alongside the story of Abraham's Covenant with God and the call to focus on our citizenship which is in heaven from St. Paul we will be guided in our steps as fellow ministers in Christ's Church. May the blessing of God be upon you all.

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