

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

I Must Keep Going

Luke 13:31-35

³¹ At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." ³² He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'

³³ In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day-- for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem! ³⁴ "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! ³⁵ Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Today is the final day of the 2010 Winter Olympics. There are only two more events to be held. The one that will get the most of the attention is the gold medal hockey game between Canada and the United States. Do you know what the other event is? It's the 50 kilometer cross country ski race. That's more than 30 miles on a pair of skis. It takes a lot to finish a race like that—a lot of training, a lot of strength, a lot of stamina, a lot of determination. Those skiers have to tell themselves, "I am going to finish this race no matter what" and then go do it. This morning we look at a small discussion between Jesus and some Pharisees and we marvel at the determination of our Savior. Jesus says, "I must keep going" and that attitude means everything to us.

This account from the book of Luke begins with a rather strange message coming to Jesus from the Pharisees. They told Jesus he should leave the area because Herod was intent on killing him. The area that Jesus was in at the time was the area of Perea or Galilee. Herod ruled both of these regions. But why would these Pharisees be interested in saving Jesus' life? If we know anything about the Pharisees, we know that they were not friends of Jesus. One reason they may have been trying to move Jesus along was that they knew he was headed to Jerusalem and they knew this is where they could set a trap for him and, ultimately, kill him. Another very likely explanation is that the person sending these Pharisees was Herod. He knew what a controversial figure this Jesus was and he wanted nothing to do with him. So he sent these Pharisees to scare Jesus out of his region. This would certainly be the type of action we would expect from a man that Jesus referred to as a crafty fox.

But Jesus was not one who was going to be moved by the words of scheming Pharisees. Jesus was only moved by the will of his Father. That is why he replies, "*I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.*" Jesus was telling these Pharisees that his course was already determined and he wouldn't change it for their sake. What makes his words all the more impressive is that he knew where that course was leading him. In the end, it would lead him up the painful steps of Calvary and to the cold wood of the cross. This was why he had come to earth—to live a perfect life and to suffer and die for the sins of mankind. And there was nothing that would distract him from that purpose.

We can take heart knowing that we have a God who loved us so much, our salvation was more important to him than his own safety or well being. Jesus' determination to continue on to the cross is all the more impressive when we compare it with our own resolve to follow the Lord, which so often falters. It's very easy for us to speak our faith boldly within the walls of church. But when speaking our faith means facing persecution, it is often easier to remain quiet. It can be fun to do the right thing when we receive praise for our actions, but what about doing the right thing when others think that right thing is foolish? Unfortunately, for us sinful human beings, our determination and resolve to speak and do everything according to God's Word is far short of perfect. That is why Jesus came to this earth—to do what we couldn't do. And there was no stopping him. Listen to his determination: *"In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day-- for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"*

It is at this point of the story where we see how Jesus' attitude is so very impressive. His mere mention of the city of Jerusalem reminds him of the spiritual state of those he was so determined to save. Jerusalem was meant to be the central place of worship for God's chosen nation. They had so much going for them. The Lord had delivered them out of slavery. The Lord had established them in the Promised Land. The Lord had sent them prophet after prophet to remind them of his love and his promise of a Savior. In return, they had turned their backs on God. These people were not interested in following the Christ. They were already plotting to kill him. One can sense the depth of emotion in Jesus' words: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"*

What is striking about Jesus' words is that even after thousands of years of dealing with these unlovable people, he still loved them with the tenderhearted love of a father for his children. Or, to use the picture Jesus uses, he loved them as a hen caring for her chicks. This is a love that we know little about. It is a love that is far superior than any love we have ever shown a fellow human being. God had been abused, mistreated and rejected by these people again and again and yet he never gave up. The unwillingness was not on God's part, but rather on the part of the Jewish people. Jesus' eager prayer was that his people would stop rejecting him.

And there were some who did. The Spirit broke down the barrier of unbelief in their heart and replaced it with a heart of faith. A faith which cried out, *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord"* Those who came to know Jesus as the true Messiah recognized that he had been sent from God. In the days following Jesus' death and resurrection, many more of the Jewish people came to faith and called on Jesus as their Savior. We especially think of Peter's work at Pentecost and his subsequent work among the Jewish people. Even today, there are Jewish people who are coming to faith and trusting in Jesus as their Savior from sin. Sadly, however, there are many more that persist in their unbelief.

Stubborn unbelief is not limited, however, to members of the Jewish faith. No, Jesus came to this earth to rescue people of every race and nationality. And he has been rejected by peoples of every race and nationality as well. The amazing thing is that, in spite of this fact, his determination

never wavered. He continued down that difficult and painful path to the cross to die for people who didn't earn or deserve such love from him.

At this time, I would like to make this whole concept a bit more personal for you. Think of someone you know, who you would consider "unlovable." Someone who seems to want nothing to do with God and his Word and who rejects any of your advances to encourage them to go to church or read their Bible. I think most of us know someone like that, and for some of us that person might be ourselves.

From God's Word today, you can be certain how your Savior Jesus feels about that person. He loves him. He loves her. He wants nothing more than for that person to return home and to come back into his loving arms. In short, he has not given up on them...and neither should you. Even to someone who seems completely unwilling, the Lord extends his heart filled with love. He does this in many different ways. He has given them his Word to read. He has given them this church to come to and hear the Word proclaimed. He has given them you as a friend or a relative to talk with them about the Savior. Wherever the Word is present, the Spirit is there, too. Wherever the Spirit is present, there is hope.

After all, think of how the Lord brought stubborn, unlovable people like you and me into his kingdom of grace. He can do the same for your friend, your neighbor, your sibling, your child, your spouse, your parent...whoever it is. This is more than a far off possibility. It is our Lord's heartfelt desire. This is the God who said of his rebellious people: "*I have longed to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.*" Praise God that he is a God who is determined to love the unlovable. And pray that he will bring many more stubborn and unwilling people into the peace of his forgiving love, for Jesus' sake. **Amen.**

Sermon No. 257
February 28, 2010
Pastor Steven Hahm
pastorhahm@hotmail.com
225.752.5503