

GETTING THERE
Luke: 13: 31 through 35
Preached by Dr. Cahill
Sunday, February 21, 2016

“ Jesus, Herod’s out to get you! Run for your life! Abort your mission! Save yourself!”

As you know, Jesus had numerous confrontations with the Pharisees. Many of them wished Jesus would just go away because he undermined everything they worked for. They feared the Messiah’s coming would be indefinitely delayed until all of God’s people followed them in faith and practice.

That explains their desperation in opposing Jesus. They believed he was the greatest impediment to the Messiah ushering in God’ kingdom.

Oddly enough, the Pharisees and Jesus were both working for the same cause but in two entirely different ways, the right way and the wrong way. Guess who was right.

So why did the Pharisees warn Jesus? Two explanations.

The first: Some Pharisees were followers of Jesus. Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night and Joseph of Arimathea, who gave his tomb to Jesus, both come to mind. So the Pharisees who warned Jesus may have been really worried about him.

The second explanation: The Pharisees’ warning was a ruse. Pretending to be concerned about Jesus’ safety, they we’re really trying to scare Jesus out of their neighborhood. If that’s the case, their scheme backfired because Jesus became more resolute than ever.

“Go tell that old fox for me, I’m casting out demons and performing my cures today and tomorrow and on the third day I will finish my work.” (Luke 13:31-35)

The Gospels leave no doubt Jesus was totally committed to completing his mission. He announced not once but three times he was heading to Jerusalem to be crucified and his disciples couldn’t talk him out of it. Not even death threats distracted Jesus.

It was more than moxie that made Jesus say, “Go tell that fox...” Unlike most of his contemporaries, Jesus couldn’t care less if anyone heard him call the great and powerful Herod a fox. Foxes were metaphors for an unimportant, irrelevant, miserable excuses for a human being. From what we know about Herod from the gospels and contemporary Roman historians, Herod was just that.

Like his Uncle Herod, the same who murdered all the baby boys in Bethlehem under two years of age, young Herod was a bloodthirsty tyrant. He was also an opportunist who collaborated with the Romans and a lecher who took his brothers wife and lusted after his

brother's daughter. Worst of all, Herod was paranoid sociopath. Maybe Jesus should've taken the Pharisees warning seriously.

But Jesus had more than a strong sense of courage and destiny, he had a stronger belief in God's sovereignty. Jesus totally trusted his life to God. His heavenly father gave him a purpose and nothing could keep Jesus from that purpose. If anyone tried putting a stumbling block on the road, he knew God would turn it into a steppingstone, bringing him closer to the third day. This is perfectly demonstrated in this morning's gospel reading.

We need to learn from this story. Jesus wasn't just playing a tough guy, saying, "That Herod doesn't scare me!" Instead, Jesus saw God's big picture. And he could see God's big picture because he spent hours in prayer and meditation, communing with his father in heaven. That made all the difference.

Whenever you or I are confronted with overwhelming odds, we tend to panic and take matters into our own hands. It's so easy to look before you leap, speak before you listen, rush into something before sitting down to think, pray and consult with wise people to help make the right decision.

That's what enabled Jesus to resist his temptations. Every day he prayed and kept open the lines of communication. That alone explains Jesus' confidence. He knew his adversaries were throwing up roadblocks that could never neutralize God's sovereignty. Through his intimate friendship with God Jesus experienced God as being all powerful, all knowing, and all loving. Jesus knew from experience nothing could ever compromise God's intentions.

Even when everything seems hopeless and your back's against the wall, if you're wise and brave enough to figure out what God wants from you, in any given situation, and then you do it without reservation, you'll make it through your time of crucifixion until you arrive at the third day and find God's already there, waiting to raise you up.

I haven't told you a Winston Churchill story for some time. Here is one of my favorites:

In the spring of 1940 on the night King George names Churchill is a new prime minister at a time when the English are the inevitable Nazi invasion, Churchill went to bed and immediately fell asleep. He later wrote, "I felt as if I was walking with destiny, that'll my past life as a preparation for this hour and trial. I slept soundly and had no need for cheering dreams. Facts are better than dreams."

There's an example of someone having confidence in a power far beyond himself. Churchill was once asked, "Do you believe in God?" he answered, "I'm not sure but I try to live my life as if I do."

How then do you explain Churchill's confidence when everything was going against him? I'd say it was by the grace of God. As Maltby Babcock put it, "...although the wrong is oft so strong, God is the ruler yet."

Churchill was aware he was walking with destiny, predetermined before the dawn of time.

We Presbyterians have a word for this, "predestination," an often misunderstood term.

Predestination doesn't mean that way before God said, "Let there be light," God fed into his celestial computer all the facts and data determining everything that would ever happen. If that were true, Herod, and the rest of us, never had a chance. We'd just be pawns in God's cruel game.

But we aren't preprogrammed victims of fate. We have the freedom to choose.

So, what does predestination mean? It means we are predestined to belong to God! At the dawn of time, before "the beginning," God marked you, me and everyone else for salvation. God also predestined himself to love us unconditionally but we have the right to either accept or reject God's love.

Yes, God has a plan and purpose for your life. God never forces us, but God gives us the freedom to choose.

It sounds good in theory but it starts getting "iffy" when put it into practice.

We can read about Jesus trusting God with his destiny but that doesn't do us much good when we're in the thick of it. Unless, you dig deep into yourself and uncover that divine spark and go with it. That's when you can become bold and confront the roadblocks keeping you from living out your purpose.

A seven-year-old boy order a grilled cheese sandwich at a high-end restaurant. The waiter told him grilled cheese wasn't on the menu.

The boy, with the confidence of the child, was persistent. He asked, "Do you have bread and cheese?"

"Yes," answered the waiter.

"Do you have a frying pan?"

The boy got his grilled cheese sandwich.

Then the little boy then ordered a milkshake.

This time the waiter was ready for him. “Young man we have milk and ice cream but we don’t have any syrup.”

Little boy asked, “ Well, do you have a car?”

If and when you’re equally determined, you usually get what you want... if it’s God’s will. That makes all the difference. It has to be God’s will. You have to want what God wants, otherwise you’re in for a lot of frustration.

“Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find.” Jesus didn’t promise you’ll always get what you want, if that were the case we’d be spoiled brats. God gives us what God wants because what God wants we need, especially those graces: faith, hope and love.

During Lent we can retrace Jesus footsteps from the time he struggled with temptation in the wilderness to his greatest bout with temptation in the garden of Gethsemane. His crucifixion was near, just hours away. He was having second thoughts. He wondered, “Why should I lay down my life for people who betray me, deny me and hate me? Father, you can get me out of this mess. If you want to you can save me from suffering for people who don’t care about me. Give me one good reason what I should go through with this?”

Did you ever pray like this?

Thankfully Jesus was able to get up off his knees and face his tormentors, trusting God would bring him one step closer to the third day, the best day, Easter morning.

Your life also has a direction and a purpose. Yes, you were made to live in this world but you are also made to experience being a citizen of God’s kingdom. The kingdom of God, not a place or a state of mind but the stated being Christlike, becoming more and more like Jesus by living first for God, then your neighbor and last but not least, yourself.

I said this last week, Lent is not just a season to give up something, Lent is also a season to take on something. You are being asked to take on your cross, your God given purpose in life and then follow Jesus, first to his cross and finally, on the third day, his empty tomb. Mind you, you can’t skip over the cross, you can’t skip over the life of discipleship and sacrifice that Jesus models for us.

If you do you try, you won’t get it, you’ll remain clueless and insipid because you’re only living for yourself. Once we learn, “it’s not all about me but it’s all about God,” that’s when living make sense.

Think about these things and make your decisions accordingly. Make the right decision and you’ll be well on your way to the third day. God be with you. Amen.