

The Second Sunday in Lent
February 25, 2018
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Luke 13:31-35 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 keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’ **33** In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

34 “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, and 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.’”

“Propelled Forward for Foolish People”

As the Winter Olympics come to a close today, we can look forward to the next games in four years. There were some amazing performances and astonishing achievements. But the back stories of the athletes are really what grip us and pull us into the events. For each athlete, the Olympics are a destination. There has been quite a journey just getting to that point. Some overcame heartbreak from the last Olympics. A crucial mistake at the worst moment kept them off the medal stand. Four years of training has gone into making sure the same thing doesn't happen again. Others had key injuries at the worst possible times. We expect knee injuries and back stiffness. But one athlete who races on skis and shoots up into the air 18 feet beyond the half pipe punctured a lung in training. Just being able to compete must be a victory.

At that is one of the things we admire the most. Not just that these athletes perform tricks and feats we would never even attempt. But the sheer determination to embark on this journey and the persistence it takes to get back on the journey when it has been sidetracked. They must be pushed forward by some almost-superhuman force.

And that's what we get with Jesus when we open to Luke chapter 13. We see Jesus on a journey. He encounters setbacks. He will experience disappointment. But that doesn't stop him from pushing onward. Jesus knows his destination and his goal at that destination. But here's the key difference between Jesus and those Olympians. He knows he's not even really doing it for himself. He isn't in it for recognition or glory, for prizes or awards. Jesus pushes forward for you. Jesus has you in mind the entire time he is on his journey. Jesus sets out for Jerusalem. But he is determined to go wherever necessary for you. Jesus knows how it will all end at Jerusalem. But when he remembers it will be for you, it will all be worth it.

Luke 13 catches Jesus toward the end of his ministry. Jesus is on his journey. Geographically speaking though, he hasn't even arrived at his final destination yet. He is still teaching and preaching. He calls people into God's kingdom. And he's not afraid of getting under the skin

of the people who think they have things figured out, but are actually on the wrong path entirely. So naturally, Jesus encounters resistance.

Luke 13:31 gives us one example: **“At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, ‘Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.’”** Now, this could be genuine concern for Jesus from the religious leaders of the day. They may have been trying to give a warning to someone who they at least identified as an important rabbi beloved by masses of people. But from the rest of Scripture, we see the Pharisees had already made up their minds about Jesus. They viewed him as a threat. He was competition for the attention of the people. And Herod, in this case the son of Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, didn't want Jesus stirring up trouble in his corner of the kingdom. So he engages in some cowardly diplomacy. He doesn't want to arrest Jesus or bully him with his soldiers since that might risk a riot from the people. Calling someone a fox meant Jesus saw Herod as weak and wily, lacking real power and dignity. He simply tries to scheme his way into intimidating Jesus into leaving his region. Then Jesus can be someone else's problem.

A few months ago a video went viral of a man rescuing a rabbit from the wildfires in California. A man stops his car and rushes after this critter while it dances around at the edge of the fire. When it darts back into the fire through a small break in the flames, the man darts in after it. What a hero! Maybe not. Researchers who study animal behavior report that few animals that burrow into holes below ground actually die even during extreme wild fires. They are safer in their homes than trying to outrun the flames. One scientist even theorizes that this rabbit may have been trying to get back to a brood of baby bunnies. They would be spooked by the fire. And the parent could round them up and make sure they are safely snuggled inside their burrow beneath the threatening flames. So instead of rescuing the rabbit, this kind hearted motorist may have doomed a batch of baby bunnies.

Maybe. We may never really know the whole story. But in Luke chapter 13 we do get to see what Jesus is up to and why. People may have wonderful intentions for keeping Jesus away from danger. But it just shows they don't really understand Jesus. Why he came. What he is setting out to accomplish. And that includes us.

To help set us straight, we don't need to rely just on theories or incomplete research. Jesus shows us his determination: **“In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!”** (Luke 13:33) All we need to do is come to grips with our own pride. Pride provides resistance. Pride says I need to keep my spiritual options open and don't want to fully commit to Jesus exclusively. Pride says I'm fine on my own; I don't need Jesus pressing on for me. Pride may even recognize I need some help, I could use a little coaching on how to improve my spiritual performance. But I definitely don't need anyone to die for me. I'm not that much of a lost cause. Jesus is so arrogant. Jesus is trying to limit all my other choices.

Pride takes a different form for God's people who embrace Jesus' journey and have a better sense of what he will do when he reaches his destination. We see those threats and that intimidation and we take it to heart. Being on team Jesus doesn't always get the results we

are after. People push back when we try to share Jesus with them. Even serving Jesus in faith meets resistance. Other believers disappoint us. We don't get to see the kind of success we hope for. We experience so much pushback and witness so many failures, it's tough to engage 100%, joining in wholeheartedly in mission for Jesus.

Ultimately, pride pushes me and you off the path from Jesus' journey. But that doesn't stop Jesus. He is still propelled forward. Propelled forward for foolish people like me and you.

Embracing Jesus means letting go. We hear the heartache of Jesus when he reaches out to pride-filled people: **"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, and you were not willing."** (Luke 13:34) Finding shelter under his wings requires embracing failures. You and I need shelter with Jesus because our definition of success doesn't match up perfectly with Jesus. Embracing failures means we have to give up our excuses for giving up when things get tough. Embracing failures means giving up half-baked solutions to the failures I see in myself. Embracing Jesus means relying completely on Jesus. Relying completely requires complete trust is what Jesus is doing for you. But in letting go of pride, Jesus embraces you with his determination for your salvation.

Jesus doesn't let scheming politicians sidetrack his mission. He won't allow jealous religious leaders mess with his purpose. Today he will keep releasing people from lives of drudgery with demons. Tomorrow he will continue rescuing those held subject to medical dangers. The next day will will push forward in ministry. Today in Galilee, tomorrow just outside Samaria, the next day on toward Jerusalem. Today he will shy away from human success. Tomorrow he will turn down personal glory. The next day he will be one step closer to making the ultimate sacrifice.

Jesus knows full well what awaits him in Jerusalem. He understands completely his fate. Jesus is propelled forward for foolish people. People like you and me.

Who are the real heroes in our society? More than olympic athletes, we recognize the true bravery of first responders. They go through brutal training. They are aware they will have to use that intense training in some very high risk situations. They might never get recognition. They might never get a medal. People might never cheer for them. But their satisfaction comes from knowing they were able to help people, to make someone's life better or save that life. They know what they have to do and they do it.

Jesus had work to do. His life and ministry were important. But they were also crucial training building up toward an important moment. He was going where the prophets were killed and messengers stoned. Jesus doesn't just have a word to share, a message to bring to the people of Jerusalem. He comes with work to finish. He won't be done until he has accomplished every item on the divine check list for the rescue of humanity. He won't reach his goal until he finds himself on the cross. He wont finish his work until he experiences death.

Embrace the foolish determination of Jesus. No political leaders could intimidate him from pushing forward. No religious leader could sidetrack him from what he came to do. By faith in Jesus embrace the fact that God has better plans for you than your version of success. By faith in the sacrifice performed by Jesus for the sins of the world, embrace the Jesus who is much better than one option among many. By faith in the perfection Jesus provides, embrace the Savior who does more than coach you to be better or try harder. Embrace the Savior who doesn't cajole or threaten, but gives you everything you need to be completely at peace with God.

Embrace the journey as you go through life with Jesus. His life and his work creates a highway where your pride doesn't need to grab control of the brake, where threats and intimidations doesn't need to steer you to the right or to the left. On this journey with Jesus, you can just trap yourself in and hang on for the ride. Jesus doesn't just show you how to be persistent. Jesus clears the way. Secure under Jesus's wings, fear doesn't need to get to you. Push forward defiantly, persistently toward God's goal for your life.

You have a better back story than any Olympic athlete. We see them in uniform, poised at the top of the ski hill, positioned to begin their routine without fully realizing everything that went into their journey. But your story is even better. Your life might be ordinary. It might feel like it is filled with failures and setbacks. But Jesus says you are more than a champion. You will get to shout out: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." (Luke 13:35) You know Jesus finished his journey. He reached his destination. His determination for salvation reached its goal. He did it for you. Amen.