

God is moving, again

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

Here we are on the second Sunday in our Lenten journey, a journey about reflections, contemplation, hope, fear, sorrow, forgiveness and, eventually, salvation. It's a long road we'll cover in these next few weeks, but a critical one.

Have you ever found yourself on a path you did not wish to take, but knew you **MUST** take? I can remember having to go in to the hospital for surgery. As I was being prepped, laying on a cold gurney in a sterile room knowing that if things went the "very best" I was in for some painful recovery time. Given the choice, I am sure I would have preferred to meet up with friends at the pub!

But I didn't have the choice...my future health and well-being depended on this bit of surgery.

I'm sure some of you can relate to that, being in a situation not of your choosing, not of your desire...how more then can we relate to our story from today's Gospel?

It shouldn't surprise us that as Jesus' ministry progresses, major obstacles begin to stand in His way. That's the way of things, isn't it? Small changes sometimes generate small push-back, but big things can result in major roadblocks.

For Jesus, the most obvious are the members of the political and religious establishments, both feeling threatened by him for different reasons.

The Pharisees (spiritual leaders) show up with a warning about Herod (the political leader), but can their warning be trusted? Do they really have Jesus' best interests in mind? Herod wants to kill Him, a warning that sounds pretty sobering for one moving in on Herod's territory in Jerusalem.

Surely, this is an obstacle that Jesus must take seriously in His planning to move forward! Perhaps even enough to stop the movement?

However, Jesus's determination is clear: I will keep on...I will reach My goal...I must press on. For Jesus, there is no turning back. He is on a course that cannot be interrupted, not even by a dangerous and murderous leader.

“You tell that fox,” He says, “that I will reach My goal”.

Did you ever really think about that comment? We associate foxes with being clever, and cunning. But the truth is that a fox is deceptive and wily, a small animal reduced to chasing weak animals like chicks in the chicken yard, because it has no intrinsic power. Basically, Jesus just called Herod a varmint, a pest.

And what about the chicks themselves? The city on Jesus’ radar, the one at the end of His unstoppable course, is Jerusalem. Jesus compares His love for Jerusalem to a mother hen’s love for her chicks and her desire to gather, protect, and cherish them. But Jerusalem, this cherished city, has responded to God’s clear love for them with rebellion, selfish ambitions, and violence.

Jesus holds these two facts in tension: He loves Jerusalem, but ultimately His love for her will be the death of Him. In this way, Jerusalem is a stand-in for all of us here. Jesus’ love for us is so strong that it leads to His death.

All that makes me wonder: Which is the bigger obstacle? Herod’s murderous plot to stop Jesus before He reaches Jerusalem, or the cherished city itself, loved by the Messiah, that will ultimately kill Jesus upon His arrival? Jesus’s answer to both obstacles is a simple one...nothing - not even His own death - can stop Him from reaching the goal of loving His children.

Jesus’ love is opposed from the outside, and He keeps moving toward the object of His love. Jesus’ love is rejected, and still He keeps on track to give that love away.

As I mentioned before, it’s Lent, and that means we have set a course for ourselves, a course that will end in Jerusalem, at the cross and the tomb. We have the opportunity, rather the responsibility to prepare ourselves to arrive in Jerusalem, to face the cross, or we won’t be able to take it all in.

We need to ask ourselves if our course is set as resolutely as that of Jesus. Do we have a commitment to set our faces to Jerusalem, to the place where we meet God face-to-face and give our lives up for Him?

Are we strong enough to persevere or will we allow ourselves to be stopped by the people on earth who might not be pleased with the goal we have chosen?

Can we carry on, knowing that there are obstacles outside of us that will use means both great and small to deter us? Do we have the audacity to continue on despite the obstacles that arise within our own hearts?

Often, far too often, the greatest obstacles we face are those we carry with us. It's funny, really, that the big road-blocks, which are easy to see and easy to identify are sometimes easier to defeat or circumvent in the long run. We see it, we identify it, and we work on a way around or through it.

We get that. And we humans have a grand history of standing up to the big challenge.

But what about the small ones? The hidden ones? The subtle ones?

When I was preparing for my sabbatical ride, I didn't have trouble looking at the big picture or contemplating over 1500 km in the saddle. It was the daily, *get out and ride to prepare* that was the hard part. I was busy, I had things to do. There would still be time tomorrow to work on getting in shape.

I suspect Sue felt much the same way as she prepared for the Camino pilgrimage. Sometimes it was the daily walk, especially when she was not in the mood or far too busy that was the biggest obstacle.

What obstacles do you have that are blocking your way? I know they are there, of course. We all have them, large or small, life threatening or simply inconvenient. I know they are there as well as I know each one of you.

When we face today's scripture, we must recognize that Jesus is on an unstoppable course toward Jerusalem, but that also means that He's on an unstoppable course toward us.

This is a course aimed directly at our hearts, with tenacity and determination that will not be blocked, not even by the obstacles we put in His way.

We can turn away, of course. We can deny, endlessly. We can ignore or postpone or ...well, our options are almost limitless.

But the love of Christ IS limitless. The course Jesus has set is completely and directly toward YOUR heart. And the battle is not yours alone!

Do you remember the other reading from this morning? The Epistle lesson from Philippians? Paul was addressing much this same topic when he wrote:

“Brothers and sisters become imitators of me and watch those who live this way—you can use us as models. As I have told you many times and now say with deep sadness, many people live as enemies of the cross. Their lives end with destruction. Their god is their stomach, and they take pride in their disgrace because their thoughts focus on earthly things.

Our citizenship is in heaven. We look forward to a savior that comes from there—the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform our humble bodies so that they are like his glorious body, by the power that also makes him able to subject all things to himself.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters whom I love and miss, who are my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord.”

Powerful words, a powerful reminder to us that God is moving, once again.

This story of Lent is not just Jesus’ story, but ours as well. It is not just about His determination, but ours as well. It is not just about how His story ends.

...but ours as well.

Our God is doing a marvelous thing, once again, just for you...and me.

Are you more interested in tearing down the obstacles, or erecting new ones?