

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario**  
**Sunday, February 21, 2016**  
**Rev. Andrew Reid**  
**Philippians 3:17-4:1; Psalm 27; Luke 13:31-35**  
**“Lament on the way”**

Looked at through the 20/20 lens of hindsight, it is quite a poignant picture.

Jesus of Nazareth, the one whom we know to be the Son of God, lamenting over Jerusalem, the holy city, the place that God had chosen to be God's dwelling place on earth. The Saviour of the world, lamenting the city's refusal to be gathered to him. God's chosen One, lamenting the city's apparent determination to kill the prophets and to stone those who are sent to it. God's Messiah, lamenting the fact that he too will die there.

Later on in his Gospel, in 19:41-44, St Luke says that when Jesus reached Jerusalem, he didn't just *lament* over the city: he *wept* over the city, and its failure to recognise what he called the things that make for peace. And he predicted that one day, the city would be destroyed, crushed to the ground, by its enemies because it had failed to recognise the time of its visitation from God.

But that's part of the story of Palm Sunday and Holy Week. For now I want to direct your attention to the first three verses of this morning's Gospel lesson. Listen to them again.

<sup>31</sup> *At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.'* <sup>32</sup> *He said to them, 'Go and tell that fox for me, "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work."* <sup>33</sup> *Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem."* Luke 13:31-33

Jesus' disciples were not always the first to grasp what he was about, or to understand the implications of his words and his actions. But as Jesus' ministry neared its climax, and as he made his way to Jerusalem, even they must have known that he was heading into trouble. He was about to take his message into the very heart of the Jewish political and religious establishment. The disciples must have known that he was about to take his life in his hands.

But the odd thing about this story is that it was some Pharisees – some Pharisees, no less - who came to warn Jesus not to go to Jerusalem. Usually when we run into the Pharisees in the Gospels, they are presented as opponents of Jesus and his teaching. It's not in the Gospels, but St Paul, when he was still Saul of Tarsus, was a prime example of a typical Pharisee. They were rigidly righteous, and by their standards Jesus was shamefully soft on the finer points of the Mosaic law.

But the way Luke tells it, not all the Pharisees had it in for Jesus. For a few of them came to warn him that King Herod wanted him dead. “Turn back,” they urged him. “Don't go to Jerusalem,” they told him. “Herod has already killed John the Baptist,” they reminded him. “You will be next,” they warned him. “Whatever you do, don't do this foolish thing,” they pleaded with him.

Of course, we are the ones who have 20/20 hindsight. We know that Jesus didn't heed their warning. He was on a mission and he must accomplish it. He had begun a work that he must finish. And threats and the possibility, even the virtual certainty, of death were not going to turn

him from his path. Regardless of the cost, he was determined to do what God had called him to do. As early on as 9:51, Luke says that Jesus' face was set to go to Jerusalem. And even though the results were as the Pharisees predicted – right up to Good Friday, at least, as they didn't foresee Easter morning - still Jesus stood firm, his face set to go to Jerusalem and finish the work he came to do.

It has been interesting this week to follow the events in the US Presidential campaign, with the Pope weighing in on Donald Trump and Mr Trump's response. What does it mean for people of faith to stand firm in their faith? How do we deal with the challenge of people of whose words and actions we disapprove? How do we walk the line between standing up for what we believe and respecting the beliefs and opinions of others, especially our sisters and brothers in Christ with whom we disagree?

And also in the light of some of the rhetoric we have heard coming from the States, what does it mean for followers of Jesus Christ to stand firm in their faith in today's multi-cultural, multi-religious western culture? How do we walk the line between standing up for what we believe and respecting the beliefs and opinions of faiths and religious traditions that are not our own?

These are big questions. They challenge us who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ today. What can we learn from all of this about living a faithful and godly life today? Well, one thing we can learn is to do what Jesus did: simply get on with the job that God is calling us to do.

Warned not to put himself into danger at the hands of Herod, he effectively dismissed *that fox* and went ahead anyway and did what God sent him to do. Seeing his overtures rejected by Jerusalem, he went ahead anyway and did what God sent him to do. Sensing what lay ahead for himself and for Jerusalem, he faced it and accepted it, and went ahead anyway and did what God sent him to do.

Ralph C Wood writes this in his commentary on today's passage from Philippians:

Protestants shaped by Luther and Calvin are often made nervous by notions of "imitation", as if Jesus were a moral exemplar who, like any other heroic figure, is to be imitated in order that we might earn our own salvation...Yet the imitation theme in Scripture is undeniable...both Jesus and the apostle know that true moral and spiritual formation depends on tutelage under a master – learning to follow the habits and practices of one who has become proficient in a particular trade or skill. Indeed, this is the precise meaning of the word "disciple": a learner or pupil. Like all Christians, therefore, Paul is the pupil of Christ and thus an imitator of him. He calls the Christians at Philippi to do and to be the same.

One final quotation to end with. It's something Billy Graham said around the time of the Bill Clinton/ Monica Lewinsky scandal. When he was asked if he would continue to meet with the President, he said, "It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict, God's job to judge and my job to love."