

**2 Lent – Year C – February 28, 2010**  
**Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35**  
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Right or wrong? Left or right? Up or down? Stop or go? We have come to a kind of crossroads in our Lenten journey. As we heard on Wednesday, when faced with the devil's testing, the power of Jesus' faith in action was found in His habitual resistance to evil. That in turn is the pure God-given strength of a life grounded in the habits of trust and obedience to God's will, and the disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and worship. As we all know, the decisions we make in the moment are usually predicated by all the moments of our lives up to that point. Our current choices are most essentially dictated by the habits we have formed, for good or evil, in the quotidian mystery that we simply call everyday life. However innocuous our choices may seem, they are never entirely innocent in spiritual consequence. The frequent Gospel admonition to "stay awake" tells us that our active intentionality, thought and preparation in all matters of life and faith stand us in much better stead than sleepy reaction to a constant stream of events.

The choice facing Jesus in today's Gospel reading from Luke at first seems to be whether to stay the course to Jerusalem, or to heed the warnings of the Pharisees, and run away from Herod. It seems like a straightforward choice between going forward or turning around. Yet, as with the devil's tests in the wilderness, there are layers of complexity here that highlight what Walter Wink calls Jesus' third way. In effect, this is not a question of and/or. As we see so often with Jesus' responses, He goes beyond human fears, to see with perfect clarity the unstated and hidden, offering in His response a new possibility, a new life-giving and creative option.

As usual in the Gospel of Luke, the narrative is carefully positioned contextually to add to overall story and Luke's particular concerns. In this instance, the passage immediately preceding today's reading speaks of the exclusion of evildoers from the kingdom of God, and how God's kingdom reflects a complete reversal of the worldly understanding of power. "Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last" (Luke 13:30). Today's reading begins with the entrance of some Pharisees from Jerusalem, ostensibly to warn Jesus of Herod's evil intent to kill him. Before we get to Jesus' response, we might well wonder at this remarkable desire on the part of a small group of religious leaders to suddenly care for Jesus' safety. For the most part, the Pharisees are not generally portrayed as friendly towards Jesus. At best they are resistant to Jesus' teaching, and at worst openly hostile. Indeed the majority will ultimately feel so threatened by Him that they are more than willing to arrange for Jesus' crucifixion. Could it be that this small band of Pharisees presents another test or temptation for Jesus? One with profound implications for Jesus' status as a prophet of God, and therefore one who speaks God's truth in obedience to God's will. Could it also be that the Pharisees' motivation for trying to deter Jesus from His mission in Jerusalem is nothing less than their own desire to hang on to the institutionalized religious systems of power that profit them so well, even under Roman rule?

Contrary to the other Gospel accounts of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, we heard last week how Luke switches the order of the testing around to ensure that Jerusalem is the pinnacle of Jesus' testing. It is quite deliberate and a key theme of Luke's Gospel that Jerusalem is not only the hub of Judean socio-economic and religious life, but is the center of resistance to Jesus' mission and message. In this Gospel account, after Jesus' resurrection, Jerusalem will also become the center of Christ's continuing mission to the world through the Body of Christ, with the concomitant establishment of God's kingdom of justice and peace. You and I are now poised to make sense of Jesus' response to the Pharisees at multiple levels, and to grasp at least some of the implications for our own journey to Jerusalem.

"Go tell that fox for me," Jesus says. Don't you just love that line? You know the stickers that you see in the cab windows of honking big trucks that read "No fear". This gob-smacking line can be summed up beautifully as a 'no fear' moment for Jesus. As Christians, we always want to pull back the covers just a little more, and when we do, we recall that beneath 'no fear' is actually God's perfect love that drives out all

fear. There is more: God's love commands that we put others first, and seek the very best for our neighbors. This is of consequence to what is about to happen, to Jesus' lament over Jerusalem, as well as to Jesus' third way. Jesus calls Herod a fox, and in case you're wondering, it is not a compliment. In this instance, Herod's fox-like traits are not so much craftiness, but Jesus' distinct commentary on Herod's relative lack of status to carrying out his threat. In fact, Herod's threat is blunted and even impotent, simply because it is contrary to God's will. However powerful Herod may think he is, his rule of terror, violence and fear is short-lived. The threat of death has no power over Jesus, who already knows He's heading to Jerusalem to be crucified, according to God's will, for a much higher purpose than to serve the selfish desire of a minor tetrarch.

Jesus' death and resurrection will define Godly power, in contrast to Herod's petty regime. The new way under Christ is love, unconditional love that is willing to die for the sake of the whole world. No one else is, or can ever be, the savior of the world in the way that Jesus is. However, Jesus' third way of non-violent resistance to evil is entirely within our grasp. Jesus' third way is justice through love and by the way of the cross. Godly justice is eternally relevant. We are continually creating justice through loving sacrifice in the choices you make, in the choices I make, and the habitual choices that the whole Body of Christ makes every moment of every day. Much depends on our own responses to testing and temptations, especially the ones that seem to set a short-term gain before us when what are really at stake are eternal consequences. Or a choice that tempts us to avoid suffering even though we know, just as Jesus did, that it is not God's will. The devil comes in many disguises, but his strategy and tactics have not changed much in over two thousand years. Why? Because when we want something, to paraphrase St. Augustine, it is still too easy to say to God, "Give me self-control, but not yet". And because we still wrestle with God when it comes to entering into a deeper walk with God through the narrow gate, rather than taking the wide and easy path.

If Jesus tried to save Himself, he would be a false prophet. Yet even now, Jesus laments over Jerusalem in words that conjure a maternal image of God's love and care for His children. Contrary to the malicious destruction wrought by Herod the fox, Jesus is the epitome of God's perfect love. The image of a relatively defenseless broody hen that will protect her chicks under the shelter of her wings, even to death, is powerful in and of itself, set against the predatory Herod. It is even more powerful when we connect the image of the Spirit brooding over the formless void at the beginning of all creation, and realize how God is working in Jesus' death and resurrection to initiate a new creation, with salvation for all who believe in Him. In the beauty of Jesus' third way of non-violent resistance, He still holds out hope for the win-win solution. Hope that the people of Jerusalem will see and hear His message, repent of their disobedience, and return to God. Jesus still prays for the end of violence towards all God's prophets, sent to speak God's truth. He prays, even as He knows that the leaders in Jerusalem are so embedded in their own definition of faithfulness that they only want to protect their foolish ways. In Christ, God creates a new path to His kingdom, and a new community to continue Jesus' mission in the world.

The Good News of Jesus Christ transcends all temporal power structures. Consider now the opportunity and blessing of this season of Lent to strengthen the habits of our own hearts that we may also consistently resist the devil in all our choices. How might we go beyond 'and/or' at every crossroad of life, by choosing Jesus' third way? In obedience to God's will, we become co-creators of a new path that seeks justice through love, resists violence, and offers a blessing to all in Christ's name. In the words of Sydney Smith, "Truth is justice's handmaid, freedom is its child, peace is its companion...; it is the brightest emanation from the gospel; it is the attribute of God." Go tell that fox.

Amen.