

Lent 2 / March 13, 2022

Luke 13:32

*“And He said to them, ‘Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course’.”*

Have you ever had a task you had to complete, no matter what obstacles stood in the way, or how hard the course? Jesus had a task to fulfill and nothing would prevent Him from completing it. Not the wise advice of pharisees, who may or may not have been looking out for His wellbeing, when they warned Him to flee because Herod wanted to kill Him. It is unlikely that Jesus’ chief antagonists were actually concerned about His life. Herod had killed John the baptizer, but he hadn’t threatened Jesus. Even if Herod had threatened His life, Jesus had no reason to fear. He knew that even as His life had been preserved from a different Herod in His infancy, so His life would not be endangered by another Herod in His adulthood. He would complete His course. This was the will of His Father in heaven.

Nothing would prevent Jesus from reaching His destination and completing His course. Not the worldly common sense of His chief disciple Peter, who thought it foolish for Jesus to put His life in danger by going to Jerusalem. Nothing could dissuade Jesus from completing His course. Jesus’ destination was Jerusalem, but He would complete His course on the cross on which He would die. He had been born to die on the cross for human sin. The cross awaited Him in Jerusalem. It was not fitting that a prophet should perish outside Jerusalem. He was the fulfillment of the prophets. He embodied their words. Their suffering and death foreshadowed and prefigured His suffering and death. Jesus’ course led to the cross, because through the cross He would make peace between God and humans, sacrificing Himself to make atonement for our sins. This was why He was born. This was why He died. This is why we call Him our Saviour!

Jesus would complete His course in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the most important city in ancient Israel. It was the city of David, called such because David and His men captured the citadel from the original inhabitants; the place where the temple would be built. It was called “*the city of the great King*,” in reference to the descendant of David, who would receive God’s promise of a kingdom and a reign that would never end. Jerusalem’s greatest importance was as the place in which God set His Holy Temple, through which He was present to Israel and in the world, in a special way. When King Solomon dedicated the temple, the glory of the Lord filled the Holy Place. In Psalm 28 the psalmist sang, “*O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells*.” The greatest importance of the temple was that it was the place in which God instituted the sacrificial service, through which sin was atoned and the sins of the people were forgiven. Sacrifices were offered daily for the forgiveness of individual sins; annually on the Day of Atonement, for the sins of the whole nation over the course of the previous year.

Those sacrifices were an important part of the life of the people Israel. In them there was forgiveness, yet they did not take away sin. As the author of Hebrews wrote “*in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin...*” These sacrifices showed the seriousness of sin. In the words of St. Paul, that “*the wages of sin is death*.” They showed that sin is the cause of death. Furthermore, these sacrifices showed that sin could only be atoned by death. Those sacrifices, repeated over and over, showed the need for one perfect sacrifice that would actually take away sin and truly give forgiveness to human beings. Jesus would be that sacrifice.

Those sacrifices foreshadowed the coming of Jesus, who in the temple of His body, offered the one perfect sacrifice that atoned for the sin of the world; once and for all, forever. The temple which embodied the presence of the Lord, was a foreshadowing of the incarnation of Jesus; who as the Son of Man embodied God on earth and who would present Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of every human being; and who as the Son of God, had the power to make that sacrifice effective for the forgiveness of all who believe, in time and for eternity. Jesus’ course from the moment of His conception and even before, led to Jerusalem and to the cross. Jesus would finish His course in Jerusalem. In his death and resurrection, He became our Saviour from sin and our Redeemer from death!

Jerusalem was called the ‘holy city,’ but not because of the people who lived there. Jerusalem was holy, because the Lord dwelt there through His temple. He expressed His holiness, in forgiveness through the sacrifices offered in the temple. Otherwise, it was a most unholy city. The citizens of Jerusalem and the people of Israel, frequently and chronically turned away from the Lord to worship idols. The temple was treated as a blank cheque, through which the king, priests and powerful people, drew on God’s mercy in forgiveness, while living lives of open and abject sin. They presumed on God’s grace, paid lip service to God, while abusing their neighbours.

The prophets constantly called them to turn from their sins and live with God in faith and with one another in faithfulness. In response as Jesus said, they killed the prophets. They stoned those God sent to turn them from their sins. They refused to repent and prevent the destruction which would come because of their sin. Lent is a time of reflection and repentance. Lent is a time to consider how we are living in relationship God and to others; our actions and attitudes. Lent is a time to turn to the Lord for the mercy of forgiveness and to seek the grace to express our faith by living in faithfulness with God and with one another.

Most outrageously, the citizens of Jerusalem turned the temple in which the Lord's presence dwelt, into a good luck charm. They believed that because of the temple, no harm would come to them and no enemy would breach the city walls; no matter how they lived and how far their hearts were from God. In our Old Testament Lesson, the prophet Jeremiah told them they were wrong! It was as the Lord said through Isaiah, "*This people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.*" Their hearts had wandered far from the Lord, because they wouldn't listen to the word He spoke through His prophets.

Jeremiah warned the leaders of Jerusalem that the temple would not protect them. Their help came from the Lord. The Lord would only help them, if they took His words to heart and honoured Him with their lives as well as their lips. Their response was to arrest him and seek to kill him. They accused Jeremiah of sinning against the temple. As if he were sinning by speaking against their abuse of the temple. During Lent we consider our hearts, to see if we have wandered from the Lord in any way in our actions and in our attitudes. We consider if we are presuming on His grace, while our hearts are far from Him. We return to the Lord, receiving forgiveness in the gospel. We return to the Lord, seeking the guidance of His Spirit in the word He has spoken through the prophets, and evangelists. We return to the Lord, seeing Jesus in His cross. Through Jesus and by His cross, we receive the mercy of forgiveness and the blessing of the Holy Spirit, so we may follow Jesus in faith and faithfulness.

Jerusalem was Jesus' destination and the cross was the goal of Jesus' course, but neither were His ultimate destination. The cross awaited Jesus in Jerusalem. On the cross Jesus suffered and died to pay the debt of our sin. The cross was His goal, but Jesus' ultimate destination was the Father's side after He rose on the third day. This is also the goal of our faith! Our destination is the Father's presence; in the new Jerusalem, which will descend from God when Christ returns. God will again dwell with His people as in the beginning. He will wipe the tears from every eye. There will be no more death, sin, crying or pain. The old order of existence in bondage to sin, under the condemnation of death, will have passed away. This is the destination to which our faith leads and our goal as we follow Jesus beneath His cross.

As we continue our pilgrimage through life and journey through the season of Lent, may God bless us with His mercy for the sake of Jesus. May He bring us to the goal of our faith, our share in the resurrection of Jesus and to our eternal destination, in His presence in the new Jerusalem, where His glory dwells. In Jesus' name. Amen