

2nd Sunday in Lent
February 21, 2016
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, IA
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

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Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

- So, what is your agenda for the week ahead?
- What are the things you have to get done?
- And what are your long-range goals?

Often questions like this can leave us feeling overwhelmed, but it could be worse.

Just look at everything Jesus had on his agenda.

In this passage we get a glimpse of his daily tasks and life goal.

- He says “Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.
- Yet today, tomorrow and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.”

How would those tasks look on your daily planner?

- To do today: cast out demons, cure illnesses.
- To do today, tomorrow and the next day: get to Jerusalem to get killed
- End goal: rise again on the third day.

Kind of puts things in perspective. Maybe doing my taxes isn't so bad.

Jesus lays out his tasks and goals when the Pharisees tell him to flee for his safety.

It seems they're trying to scare him in hopes that he'll stop doing his daily work.

Maybe they're motivated out of the goodness of their hearts to warn Jesus that Herod wants to kill him; but it isn't likely.

Things haven't been going well between Jesus and the Pharisees so it's much more likely that they're in cahoots with the local ruler Herod and trying to scare Jesus into leaving the area.

Jesus seems to be aware of this when he tells them to go bring a message to Herod.

Jesus' daily work is threatening the status quo that benefits the political and religious leaders so they keep trying to find ways to shut him down.

But Jesus will not be stopped. He keeps his focus on his daily tasks and on the overall plan that he will enter Jerusalem and give his life in love for all people.

And then on the third day he will finish his work. On the third day after his crucifixion he will rise again showing that love cannot be defeated.

In the face of threats and obstacles, Jesus displays amazing courage.

So his focus, goals and courage are all really inspiring.

We need to be careful however, that we don't imagine Jesus as some kind of superman figure, leaping over tall buildings, casting out demons and facing every threat with nerves of steel.

- Certainly Jesus was fully divine but he was also fully human, and he shared all the challenges of life in this world.

- He knew disappointment and frustration. He longed to gather Jerusalem under his wings but they weren't willing.
- He got tired and hungry, sad and discouraged.

If we make Jesus out to be some kind of superhero he just seems holy and distant and removed from our lives.

And then we assume the role of bystanders who are amazed by Jesus, who think all we can do is say thank you to the guy who swoops in to make everything better.

Yet Jesus came to share in our lives and to draw us into God's work of healing, loving and restoring the world.

We each have a role to play in this work, even if our to-do lists don't include performing miracles.

As we go about our daily work, paid and unpaid, in our homes, families and in the larger world, we each have the opportunity and responsibility to be part of God's work in the world.

We take our part not so much by doing things that are explicitly religious but by showing the compassion of God in all that we do.

Martin Luther was once approached by a shoe-maker who felt his work wasn't Godly enough.

Luther assured him that he could serve God most by being the best shoemaker he could be, no miracles required.

We serve God best by carrying out our tasks and roles thoughtfully and well, by using the gifts God has given us.

We take our part by practicing kindness and patience and letting others show kindness to us, by working to love those who are difficult.

As members of the body of Christ, we are also each called to the work of the church, to sharing the good news of Jesus in our words and deeds. We are asked to use our gifts so that all people would experience God's healing and reconciling work in the world.

We each have different gifts to contribute to this work but, again, no miracles are required.

What is required is the kind of courage that Jesus shows in the face of threats from Herod and the religious leaders.

- And it's important to note that the courage he displays here isn't Superman type heroic actions.
- His courage is the kind of one step at a time, keep your eyes on the prize, take things as they come kind of courage.

He does the work in front of him and he keeps slowly making his way toward the goal of giving his life in love.

Even as he does, he has to trust that God, the creator, will ultimately finish the work by raising him on the third day. Even Jesus isn't responsible for all the work, just for his part.

Notice too that the kind of courage Jesus shows is the kind that includes vulnerability and honesty about challenges and struggles.

- Jesus compares himself to a mother hen, to an animal that's very vulnerable to foxes like the ruler Herod.
- He expresses his longing to shelter Jerusalem as a hen shelters her children under her wings.
- He laments that they are unwilling to be gathered.

The kind of courage Jesus shows is what we need as we seek to take our part in God's work.

Meeting the needs of our loved ones, serving the world, living with love in the face of so much anger and violence can sometimes feel like herculean tasks. We can easily get overwhelmed.

Yet in Jesus we see that we just need to do our part and trust the rest to God. We don't need to have superhuman strength, simply showing up to our daily tasks is important. Sometimes strength is showing up with your hair combed when you'd really rather escape, one step at a time, one a day at a time.

And we don't have to take it all on. Even Jesus needed help to finish his work, it isn't all up to us.

- We can say no to things we discern aren't our work;
- We can stop and rest and pray as Jesus often did;
- We can trust that God isn't asking us to save the world, just take our part.

We can also be honest about the challenges and failures we face in doing God's work. We can lament and express frustration as Jesus did, we can be vulnerable. We can ask for help.

And probably the most important thing we can do is to let ourselves be gathered under Jesus' mothering wings each week as we gather for worship.

Here we are nurtured, fed and loved as we sing, as we pray, as we hear God's word of love, as we reflect, as we go to the table.

Here we find what we need for all the tasks of our daily life, for all our work of loving and serving in God's world.

So now, let's take a few moments to simply rest under the nurturing wings of Jesus, to draw the strength and courage we need to take our part in God's work.