

Second Sunday of Lent

The Rev. Rachel Eskite

[Genesis 15:1-12,17-18](#)

[Philippians 3:17-4:1](#)

[Luke 13:31-35](#)

[Psalm 27](#)

Jerusalem, Jerusalem

the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!

These are some of the words of Jesus' retort to the Pharisees who have come to redirect/thwart his progress towards Jerusalem.

Jesus has turned his face toward Jerusalem, the city upon a hill. He has set his course, he has decided to return. Determined to return—return home—to the heart of it all, despite those who might try to deter him or alter his course.

'Turn around,' they say, 'Herod wants to kill you.'

It's like the voice of satan from the wilderness (of last week's readings) has met Jesus on the road to Jerusalem in the form of Pharisees. Those who hold authority in organized religion passing their disapproval off as helpful 'advice' or as a 'favor.' As some sort of nicety, done for Jesus' sake, a way to mask their own discomfort, their own feelings of insecurity or doubt that have cropped up in the face of such a strong presence, in a presence that exudes the love and mercy of God.

But Jesus sees right through them. Jesus has not forgotten the wilderness wandering he did even though so much of his journey has passed.

Not even Jesus is immune to temptation cropping up, to obstacles along his path.

This walk to Jerusalem, it seems, is like another wilderness, one that takes the shape and form of real life and real people, instead of the weeds & reeds of desolation we expect. In my experience as one walking the journey of faith, a wilderness rarely looks like a wilderness. More often than not, a wilderness can creep up on us when we think we are living our lives and doing what we think is right.

And no amount of faith or trust in God can prevent us from going into periods of wilderness. Jesus shows us that, the season of Lent shows us that, and that is because a wilderness is not a failing, is not a moral mark, is not due to not believing enough, is not God testing us, and is not God trying to teach us a lesson.

Wilderness happens, and Jesus shows us—embodies for us—that God is with us in them.

Debie Thomas, in her reflection for this week, reminds us that what Jesus “offers [us] is not the absence of danger, but the fullness of his unguarded, open-hearted, wholly vulnerable self in the face of all that threatens and scares us.”

Being open-hearted and vulnerable, healing the sick, tending to the needy, feeding the hungry, returning agency to those who have had it taken away, treating every living being with dignity through not only his words, but primarily through his actions.

This is what makes this particular instance of wilderness different from last week’s understanding of it—at this point in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is on the move, waist-deep in the ever-broadening, ever-deepening current of ministry.

Jesus continues, no matter the obstacles, temptations, or naysayers, to gather us to himself, to draw us close like a mother hen does her brood and hide us under his wing. This maternal imagery used by Jesus is evocative because it challenges socially understood norms of who a prophet is, of who the messiah is.

Here, Jesus is not riding into battle for us, but rather Jesus is meeting us where we are in the midst of our daily struggles.

And this is exactly what Jesus tells the pharisees—‘you tell that fox that I am healing and casting out demons and making my way to Jerusalem.’ Jesus is working and is determined to stay the course.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem

the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!

He retorts. Luke tells us that Jesus knew exactly what was awaiting him within the city, and yet he decides to go anyway.

Jesus decides to continue healing and teaching, decides to continue showing us God's glory through acts of mercy and kindness, compassion and grace.

Such work is vulnerable, and that which is vulnerable comes with risk, and risk is uncomfortable. In fact, if you are faced with risk and do not feel uncomfortable, then perhaps, the risk is not what you think it is. It is like the line in that Killers' song, "how do you know what your right if you're not nervous anymore?"

This is not to say that we need to be consumed with anxiety or doubt to know that we are going in the right direction, but rather this is to say that often being so open and vulnerable can cause us to feel less sturdy and grounded, and that is OK.

To be so open is to be ready for the Holy Spirit when it shows up, is to be ready to meet Christ on the roads of our every day lives, is to be authentically ourselves even when it feels like we cannot do that.

Jesus was nothing but passionately and courageously himself—that is to say—God's own beloved son. Jesus exuded the love and light, mercy and compassion of God, and that made some people excited and others uncomfortable. You see, choosing to heal people and cast out demons on the way to Jerusalem as Herod is closing in on him, is an act that puts God first. God above and before everything else.

And what we see in this decision is that putting God first means tending to the people directly in front of him, being present where he is—right here and right now. Jesus is not chasing a religious ideal, Jesus shows the people—shows us—that belonging to God means drawing closer and closer to others—meeting them where they are, asking them what their needs are instead of assuming.

There are so many Herods in our lives that tempt us to take our attention from being present in the here and now—it is in the here and now that God is unfolding and unfurling in front of us. In touch, in small interactions, in family meals, in acts of forgiveness, in moments of stillness and self-care, in the grind of the work week and the mundane of the day-to-day.

The more and more I walk this path God has called me to, the more I realize that serving God is actually quite simple. And it's really hard to mess it up.

I, like so many of us, have ideals of things, have an understanding of how I think things should be, of how I think I need to be serving God, when in actuality, God has been in front of me this whole time.

I know I am not alone in this. We—all of us—have hopes and dreams, and, likewise, all of us have had to reevaluate our expectations, have felt loss & grief when things did not turn out the way we hoped, have felt angry or sad when people disappoint us.

And, yes, even people in positions of leadership and authority, people we think have the answers, can and will disappoint us.

And that is one of the places God shows up because it is one of the places where God's mercy, compassion, and forgiveness are most tangible.

Jesus expresses his own disappointment by saying how he has tried and tried to gather the people of Jerusalem under his wing and yet they resist, and yet they flee and go astray, and yet, and yet, and yet...

Jesus still shows up, with his heart open, radiating the presence of God, drawing us ever closer to the one who loves us beyond our comprehension.