

Luke 13:31-35 and Philippians 3:17-21 - Lent 2

God's Fierce Love For Us.

Mar 2022

Luke 13:31-35 NIV

31 At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." **32** He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' **33** In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem! **34** "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. **35** Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Philippians 3:17-4:1 NIV

17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. **18** For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. **19** Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. **20** But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21** who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

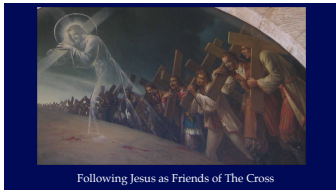
4 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

Message

Lent 2

Intro:

Today is the second Sunday in Lent shadowing Jesus as he walks to his Cross and Resurrection. The Lenten Gospel readings in this season feature Jesus as our pioneering saviour on his journey to his cross for us. As he comes closer to the cross he brings increasingly urgent lessons so the way of Jesus is made sharp.



Following Jesus as Friends of The Cross

For the baptised disciple, this is the essential defining journey we all walk in Christ. We describe this core business as 'Discipleship'.

In the 'Jesus School of Transformation' Discipleship involves bringing the old us to death so the new us may rise and grow in us. This involves some tough lessons and change.

For natural people with natural minds living with a cross is a counter-intuitive, unnatural journey for losers. That says something about us here this morning.

This focus is Christianity served hot. It could even be seen as 'extremist'!

Lent is that sort of season. Marching to death at the cross is not for the faint hearted so it good time to re-examine the fundamentals! For us in Lent we may consider how discipleship involves laying hold of the cross and embracing death-to-sin.

Meanwhile, perhaps you came here today to be encouraged and hear some good news? I am aware of the disruption and uncertainty happening around us as a pandemic, economic down-turn and this palpable sense of unhappiness and anxiety builds.

The good news in Lent is that God invites us as we are to die, one step at a time as represented by a cross. This is the Jesus way. God invites us to die with Jesus in the hope of joining his first-born and beloved son, as a glorious child of God.

We just heard St Paul plead with his friends at Philippi to really take hold of this. Perhaps they had lost their first love and their focus on Christ crucified as their model and inspiration. Listen:

Philippians 3:17-21
 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

¹⁷ Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Can you feel the passion here?

Paul's tip is this: Set and train your eyes on the godly example you have in those who love the cross. Do you have models of that? Do you know people who love the cross?

Then ominously he says: Realise that there are many, even those known to you in church who are actually enemies of the cross.

Q¹ Why are some considered enemies of the cross of Christ?

A¹ Because instead of bringing their old life to death so they might live anew in Christ, they ignore the cross and the death it involves to simply continue as they are. They may even expect Christ to preserve their old lives rather than transform it. They want God to bless their existing sinful ways and uphold their selfish choices in the manner of their choosing. They may even expect sin to be blessed.

These ones are enemies of the cross of Christ. They want Easter without Good Friday. This is not unknown in consumerist and comfort seeking churches.

Paul refers to them graphically as those whose "god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."

We may enjoy a full stomach and good living but our hope, is in the coming of our Saviour on the Day of Resurrection when we will be raised like him – a glorious human being suited to eternity. Therefore, I worship him as my living hope and do not devote myself to earthly things.

This is why the Cross of Christ is to be my friend. The death of my present self allows the birth of my glorious self in Him. To die is gain.¹

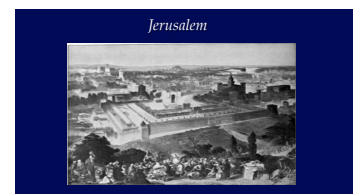
Gospel Passage.

So let's now take up today's Gospel reading to see Jesus living and working this out. As disciples of Jesus let's look closely at Jesus and take in what he says.

This morning's gospel reading shows Jesus at a particular point in his journey to the cross and new life.

Last week he was in the wilderness getting his basic policy issues worked out in response to the devil's tests around whether there was going to be a cross or might salvation be won another way?

This week he is on a main road nearing the gates of Jerusalem and about to enter.



Even though the cross is almost just around the corner he still has to choose to go there one step at a time.

¹ Philippians 1:21 - For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

We know from other places that if someone tried to distract Jesus from the cross they got quite a sharp response, in fact Jesus was capable of delivering a very firm rebuke. Those who think Jesus is always mild-mannered get to see and hear something hot and passionate here. Touch his call to the cross you get a very hot Jesus!

To Illustrate:



If you come across seals on the beach. It's usually ok unless you get between the seals and the water or mother seal and it's pup. The sleepy seal will then become ferocious and advance on you. For anyone getting between Jesus and his cross something similar happened. Peter tried once and got the message: "Get behind me Satan!"²

A Jerusalem Risk Assessment :

« At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."

Then as Jesus approaches Jerusalem some of his friends and supporters make a risk assessment. You might think that is a very caring and responsible thing to do? On the basis of their assessment, they advise him to avoid going into the city.

If you remember what King Herod did to John the Baptist this is not surprising. King Herod was in town and he could be big trouble.

Q² What would you expect a normal sensible person to do upon being told this? Would you stay out of the city or would you proceed into the danger zone?

A² Jesus had the cross in his heart. He does not dispute what he is told but replies in no uncertain terms to those warning him of danger:

Luke 13:32-33

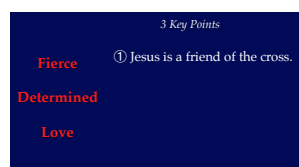
« He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' » In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

³² He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' ³³ In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

This is sharp undiplomatic language by Jesus in which he reveals his own assessment of the situation. Herod is a fox - sly, cunning and vicious. Jesus is saying, I am on a mission involving a prophet's death and Herod is not a game changer.

Applications

I want to consider three keys points this may teach us and then end with an illustration of fierce determined love you will remember:



Key Point #1

As already said: Jesus is a friend of the cross.

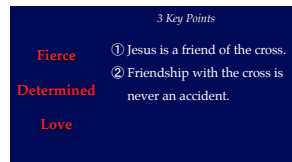
From the time he began his ministry of serving his Father in establishing God's Kingdom on earth, the Cross and all it represented was Jesus' friend. Choosing for his Father and not himself was a continuous

² Matthew 16:23 & Mark 8:33

policy that would culminate on a wooden cross with nails through his wrists and ankles as he hung in the place the Father needed him as the Lamb of God bearing the sin of the world to its death. So as Saviour of the world, the cross was his friend and he was on a journey to embrace it. He would pick it up on the assigned day and when it killed him the curtain between heaven and earth would tear never to be repaired. The cross was the key that would turn the lock of separation.

That was the vision that was set before him to which he set his face and ran hard.

Who could have foreseen this? His well-meaning friends lived in the only existing natural economy of sin and death. They had natural well-meant intentions of avoiding pain and danger so the cross and all it represented could only be considered an enemy and never a friend.



Key Point #2

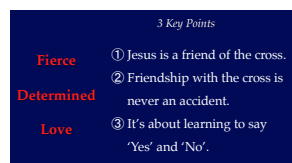
Such friendship with the cross will never happen by accident.

No one will ever decide that the cross and what it represents looks like fun. This is not a natural basis for attractational evangelism.

It comes with discipleship. Once someone chooses for Jesus and salvation in him it requires one step at a time discipleship in daily self-denial and dedication. That requires strength of conviction, character and some passionate fire for God in the bones. A committee would never decide for this – simply too risky and politically tenable! Hearts only choose this when ignited by God.

Choosing and doing that requires some fierceness. It is not for the faint-hearted.

Standing firm in your resolve to walk the call you have been called to may at times mean recognising things as they are and not as people prefer to see them which may appear judgemental. It involves embracing dangers that some consider irresponsible. People who get in the way need to be ignored which can causing offense.



Key Point #3

The psychological ability to carry this sort of fierce strength of conviction is formed from early in life and becomes audible around the age of 2 when 'Yes' and 'No' become important words for the typical toddler. From this age children are willing to let people know what they want and even protest when they are not happy with what is happening. This is really wonderful.

I have seen some classic meltdown performances at the supermarket where temptation and constraint fall apart in the consumerist environment as mother says 'No'! but toddlers insist.

Being able to express your will as a two-year-old is the foundation for mature adults to commit to what they do and do not want. Being able to say a big 'Yes' or 'No' is very important.³

Disciples are people of decision. We make up our mind. Have our say and hold to it.

Following Jesus is not simply about submission or compliance to rules. It is about wanting to walk in love, peace and the Holy Spirit with him, even when it hurts or others advise otherwise.

³ In the context of teaching against oaths and sworn promises James echoes something Jesus said about this when he says in 5:12: "let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no' be no,"

The ability and determination to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is something we need if the cross is going to be our friend. It will never happen by accident but only through decision and if you cannot make a decision for yourself, you will never choose.

The process of learning to say ‘yes’ to Jesus and ‘no’ to selfishness and sin requires thinking ahead and through circumstances and issues. Jesus was clear about Herod and the political situation. He was not ignorant of the situation and had already decided that whatever risk Herod and the others posed, his commitment to the cross was only going to proceed.

Jesus’ Illustration

With the risk of Herod and the city put to bed, Jesus now speaks to the city and its people with a picture that illustrates his commitment to them and his cross. Listen to the fierce determined love in this:

Luke 13:34-35
 34 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 35 Look, your house is left to you desolate.

34 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 35 Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Having just described Herod as a fox Jesus now pictures himself as a broody hen, a chicken looking after her chicks. Here was a secure man saying he had the heart of a mother hen for the people of Jerusalem. He knows about the fox danger but the greater instinct is a heart that is sacrificially clucky for its young.

For many years that was as much as I heard and saw. Jesus has a heart like a mother hen and longs to gather God’s lost children. What a lovely image!

But there is more to this picture.

At the time of Jesus there was a proverbial story about the brooding hen in a courtyard fire.



People knew that when a flash-fire raced through a dry courtyard it spread very fast consuming the dry straw and anything lying around. In such flash fires brooding chickens were known to gather their chicks and sit on them. The fire would then quickly sweep past and consume everything. The chicken would often die in the blaze sitting on its chicks. Afterwards people would lift off the chicken and find the chicks alive and safe underneath.



This is what Jesus was evoking when he made that statement.⁴ Jesus saw the coming fire that would devastate the house of Jerusalem. He knew that the danger was great for the children of Jerusalem and he longed to be the hen that held them safe in the fire.

This is a passionate expression of fierce love, a love that will not let go and longs to hold on even at the cost of its life so that his children may live.

It's a picture of the cross. That was the cross he was determined to reach for us. That was the cross where he would bear the fierce heat as sin burned him.



Jesus was a friend of the cross for us.

It was fierce self-giving love that so loved the world he gave himself for us.

This is the journey he calls us to follow him on as friends of the cross where old life is burned off so new life may come.

⁴ Source: N.T. Wright as heard in 1996