

March 13, 2022 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

See Your Savior Stay Focused on His Goal!

In spite of his enemies

With love as his motive

The Family Circus has remained a popular comic strip for over 60 years. One of my favorite types of the Family Circus is where you see mom telling little Billy to go and ask dad what he wants for lunch. Then you can follow little Billy's path along a dotted line as he goes downstairs and plays a game with his brother. Then he goes outside and plays fetch with the dog. Then he climbs a tree, and on and on until he finally finds dad in the garage. By then, he can not remember why he was looking for him. Little Billy is a good description of our faith life at times. Through the 10 commandments God has told us to go on the straight and narrow path through life, but we wander all over the place.

In spite of his enemies

Here in Luke 13, Jesus was in the northern region of Galilee where King Herod ruled. Some Pharisees came to him and said (:31), "**Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.**" This strikes us as very unusual because the Pharisees were the religious leaders who did not like Jesus. In fact, they wanted to kill him. Why would they warn Jesus? Was Herod really trying to kill Jesus or were they bluffing? Either way, it's clear that they did not want Jesus in their area. Their assumption was that Jesus would run away from any threats to his life, that he would do whatever was easiest and safest for him.

The devil can not go back in time and stop Jesus dying as our Savior, so he does all he can now to keep us away from Jesus and his Word. From time to time I joke that we would have better attendance if we offered free car washes for coming to church. What's behind that attempt at humor is some righteous anger and a good deal of selfish anger that people don't want to come to church to hear me tell them about Jesus. I do not think I'll ever understand why people do not want to come to church. This is where we hear the Ruler of the universe tell us how much he loves us and what he has done and will do for us. Here and now is where God touches us individually through the Sacrament. This is a special time and a special place where special things happen. If we had a guaranteed cure for COVID or cancer, how many thousands of people would rush here to get in line? How much would they be willing to pay? Here and now, through Word and Sacrament, God himself is offering eternal life with a perfectly healthy body...and all for free! Sometimes, it's like pulling teeth to get people to come to church. And we who are here this morning have to admit that we do not always come for the right reason. And even when we're here, we are not perfectly pure. Our

minds wander. Spiritual apathy for God's Word flows over into our daily lives as we do and say things that we really should not do and say.

The devil works hard at pulling us off the straight and narrow path away from God's Word which is our guide and strength. A pastor shared with me recently that a boy in his Catechism class announced, "I don't want to be here." as if that was the only excuse he needed for not paying attention and doing his homework. What's so sad is that spending time with God's Word was the best thing for him. In a recent book about religion [The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation by Rod Dreher], the author observed that in America these days "Desire is self-justifying." In other words, if I want to do something, then that's all the justification I need to do it. Whatever makes you happy is good for you and no one can say that it's wrong.

If you do not stay on the road while you're driving, you're going to end up in an accident. We've crashed on our journey through life. We've sinned. We deserve to burn eternally in the wreck of our lives. We need help. That's why I'm glad that you are here right now to see your Savior stay focused on his goal of saving you. The Pharisees did not want Jesus to be near them so they told him that Herod was threatening his life. What's sad is that spending time with Jesus was the best thing for them. Jesus replied (:32), "**Go tell that fox**, [Jesus called Herod a fox. We usually think of a fox as being sneaky and sly. But at the time of Jesus, a fox was considered a vicious animal, like a pit-bull with rabies.] "**I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow.** [Jesus was going to continue his ministry just as he had before.] **And on the third day I will reach my goal.**" [His ministry was going to continue until he rose triumphantly from the dead on the third day.] **In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"** [Jesus was going to stay focused on his goal all the way to Jerusalem where he would die.]

Jesus stayed focused for you and me. We have crashed our lives with our sins as we wandered off the straight and narrow. Jesus, however, came to your rescue. Like an EMT in an ambulance, Jesus picked you up and is giving you a ride all the way to heaven. In spite of all the efforts of the Pharisees and the devil to get Jesus to turn away from his goal of saving you, Jesus stayed focused. He did everything perfectly. With his life, death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus blazed a trail to heaven and now he's giving you a ride. Your sins are forgiven and you're on the path to paradise.

The devil continues to try to pull you off the straight and narrow path, away from Jesus. Still another trick of the devil's is to suggest that if Jesus loves you and he is all powerful then being Christian should be simple and easy with no sacrifice. And if we do suffer some sort of hardship or inconvenience, the devil suggests

that either Jesus does not love or he is not able to love you. Jesus warned us that it would not always be easy to follow him. In fact, it's going to mean carrying a cross. We know that staying with Jesus is our only hope for heaven, and so, strengthened through Word and Sacrament, we will hold on to Jesus as our Savior no matter what the danger or the cost.

With love as his motive

There's a really neat play on words here as Jesus called Herod a fox and then compares himself to a hen. Normally the fox would catch and kill the hen. But not this time. Jesus compares himself to a hen because of the way a hen protects her young. When there is danger in the barnyard, like a hawk swooping down to attack, the mother hen squawks and calls her new-born chicks. She runs toward them and spreads out her wings so they can hide under her wings. She doesn't run under the hen house to protect herself. She puts herself in harm's way to protect her children. That's what Jesus did. He put himself in harm's way to help others. His motive was love.

The capital city of Jerusalem, which represented the whole nation, had a reputation for rejecting the prophets God sent to her. They rejected and persecuted Isaiah, Jeremiah and many others. Now God sent them Jesus, the greatest prophet of all. We could have guessed that the Jews would reject and kill him too. Most people would expect Jesus to avoid Jerusalem if he knew that he was going to be rejected, unfairly arrested, falsely accused, abused and executed. Jesus knew what was coming and yet he stayed focused on the goal. In fact, he was eager for it. He was compelled by love.

Every day on the news, we are hearing about soldiers and others in Ukraine who have died in order to defend their country. They love their country, their families and others so much that they are willing to die for them. Jesus died not just for people in one country, but for the whole world. Jesus died even for those who rejected him, like these Pharisees in Luke 13. Jesus reached out to them in love. With sadness in his voice Jesus finished by saying to the Jerusalem – the Jews (:35), **"Look, your house is left to you desolate.** Jesus was warning them that since they were rejecting him, their house will be desolate. Whatever blessings they enjoy on earth will be gone forever.

Jesus warned those Jewish leaders (35), **"I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"** When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowds cheered, **"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."** That's a quote from Psalm 118 which spoke of welcoming the coming Messiah. Here in Luke 13, Jesus is telling his enemies that those words would again be spoken to celebrate his coming on Judgment Day. That would mark the time when the rejection of Jesus will result in eternal desolation for unbelieving Jerusalem. When the Jewish leaders saw

Jesus hanging dead on the cross, they were thrilled. They never expected to see Jesus or hear from him again, but they will. On Judgment Day the whole world will see Jesus. When he comes again, he won't come as a lowly and suffering servant. He will come as the King of Glory and will announce the final judgment against those who rejected him.

The Jews should have been terrified at the thought of seeing Jesus coming again in glory on the Last Day. They saw Jesus perform many miracles. They saw that he did exactly what the Old Testament prophecies said the Messiah would do. They had to know that when Jesus said he was going to come in glory to judge them, he was not bluffing. Jesus was lovingly warning them not to reject him. He wanted to shelter them under his wings. In the first part of the book of Acts, we see that a good number of Jesus did repent. They had a change of heart and looked to Jesus as their Savior. Sadly, however, most Jews did not trust in Jesus. Without Jesus, there is no heaven.

Jesus' love did not stop with the Jews or at Calvary. His love was for all people of all time, including you and me. God's love never ceases to amaze me. I am especially aware of that when I pray. The first two words already amaze me, "Our Father." To think that the high and holy and all-powerful God would invite me to talk to him with a term of endearment is amazing. Out of all the gazillion people in the history of the world, God chose me to be his child. When I pray, he bends his ear down to me to listen to me as if my prayer was the only thing happening in the whole world at that moment. Even though I have done many foolish and sinful things, even though my heart is constantly tugging me away from the straight and narrow path, God loves me. He constantly shows love to me, the loveless, so that I might be lovely. And, of course, the same is true for you.

Here in Luke 13, Jesus was headed toward Jerusalem for the last time. As he moved toward Jerusalem, he was thinking of me and you and considered his upcoming suffering and death as insignificant compared to the joy of having you by his side forever. He had nothing to gain by being your Savior. He was already true God enjoying the glory of heaven. But he loved you so much and wanted you to live with him so much that he considered the glory of heaven as incomplete if you weren't there with him. So, he came into this world, took on our frail flesh and headed toward Jerusalem as he stayed focused on his goal. He did everything perfectly for you. And now you have heaven as your guaranteed goal. Rejoice and be glad to see your Savior stay focused on his goal and save you. Amen.