

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

March 17, 2019
The Second Sunday in Lent

Luke 13:31-35
Gen. 15:1-12,17-18
Psalm 27
Philippians 3:17-4:1

There are some weeks I come to the text for a given Sunday and wonder - what am I going to do with this one? I have to admit, that was exactly what I thought when I read the Gospel from Luke. In fact, at first, I was certain it was a typo. I could not ever remember reading any book of the Bible that talked about Jesus' busy schedule as though he was carrying his calendar around with him. Nor could I remember a text where Jesus called anyone a fox.

In fact, I was so perplexed by this text that I looked up multiple translations of the Bible to see where the error had most certainly occurred. Well, I can assure you after much research...this was no misprint. Herod is indeed referred to as a fox and Jesus' day planner is completely full. At first it seems a little comical but once you dig a little deeper you realize something extremely important is happening.

Jesus is on his journey to Jerusalem...to do the important work that he was sent to do. According to Luke, this journey to Jerusalem, to the Passion, starts back at chapter 9 from Galilee and takes 10 chapters in total before he finally does arrive in Jerusalem. 10 chapters that stand between the start of his journey and the end destination. One thing is certain...we know the end destination is rather critical to the story. After all, that's what we all keep looking toward throughout the Lenten season – the death and resurrection that we know Jesus was meant to go through.

And yet, we are also given these 10 chapters to contemplate. These parts of Jesus life that may be just as important as the deadline he has to meet. So today we pick up his journey in chapter 13 and what does he do? Even though he had this incredible mission in front of him Jesus takes time to heal and teach, time to bless and restore, time to share and stand up for others. His journey tells us so much about how Jesus lived and in return, it tells us so much about how we are to live. It's the space in between...in between the start and the finish. In between the stress of our jobs, the deadlines we have to meet, the responsibilities we have to fulfill. It's what we do beyond the demands of this world. It's how we live a life of meaning, of Christian love and compassion.

I'll explain more about that in a minute.

I have been attached to the news this week...it's probably an unhealthy attachment. But, I couldn't stop reading accounts of massacres and college admissions scandals. The topics were seemingly at opposite ends of the news spectrum but at the core I realized that they all brought home one point for me...that is this societal movement to demand what we think we deserve and eliminate any barriers to getting what we assume is rightfully ours.

Therefore, I can hate you for being different, for threatening my perceived way of life. I can take advantage of whomever is in my way so that I can get ahead...even if that means taking away something from someone else. So, we hate and we cheat and we lie to make our lives into some image of power and popularity and privilege at the expense of others. *Our* deadlines and *our* desires become top priority.

The result is never good. When we look on it seems the troubles of the world are an uphill battle. Maybe it's because we know that the solution to these troubles requires a change of people's hearts and that is a very difficult equation to figure out. So, what do we do? What would Jesus want us to do?

What first came to mind was one of my favorite books...Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. There is one quote from the book that has been my go-to since I was in college and it goes like this... *"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately. To front only the essential facts of life and learn what it had to teach and not when I came to die discover that I had not lived."*

This quote has always made me think deeply about what truly constitutes a deliberate life – a life that reflects a change of heart, a commitment to something greater than oneself. To be sure, *Walden* is a bit idealistic but it makes a point. We have to first set aside our misguided motivations, those things that the world tells us we should have and things we should want. We have to take a close and honest look at our intentions so that we can begin to discern what is truly important to us and to our common humanity. That's a deliberate life.

How did Jesus do it? Well, he set a schedule. I know I've got this place to be and this deadline to meet but first I am going to spend time with others who need me. I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow and on the third day I will be finished. As the end destination pressed on Jesus took 10 chapters to fulfill others people's needs first. Deliberate action to love and care for others.

Think about it...If Jesus had been too busy worrying about what his own safety, fearful of what others might do to him, or what people might say, he would have simply rushed ahead or run away and not stopped to see how he could help. Instead, Jesus takes time...doing things that make a difference for others. Even though he himself, had his own heavy burdens to bear.

How do we apply this to our lives? Especially as we look out into a deeply troubled world? Most of us might feel helpless – if a deliberate life means a change of heart how I am supposed to do that in a way that makes a difference when the challenges are so big and so broad and so ingrained in how humanity is living? It's a valid question. The reality is that we can't change the hearts of others but we can change our own. We can't take away hate and pride and greed in the souls of other people but we can be an example of compassion, care, and community. We can't take stop every act of violence and wrong doing but we can teach our children to live by a different standard and we can stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves.

A change of heart starts small. With each of us...within each household...within each community. It starts small even if we have to at first schedule it into our calendar. So...today and tomorrow I am going to sit with my children and spend time with them. I am going to listen to them and talk to them. I am going to put aside my stress and my deadlines and show them that first, we are to care for one another. We can all do that.

Today and tomorrow I am going to check on my neighbors and make sure that they have what they need. I am going to make them a meal. Help them with their yardwork because I know they have been struggling lately. We can all do that.

Today and tomorrow I am going to attend a community gathering on homelessness and see how I can help out. I heard it was a problem here but instead of waiting for someone else to take care of the issue I am going to see what I might be able to contribute. We can all schedule that.

Today and tomorrow...you fill in the blanks.

Figuring out what your deliberate life is all about takes honest reflection and the desire to change your heart. Henri Nouwen describes that kind of changed heart in his book *Life of the Beloved* this way...

"The blessings that we give to each other are expressions of the blessing that rests on us from all eternity.... It is not enough to be chosen. We also need an ongoing blessing that allows us to hear in an ever-new way that we belong to a loving God who will never leave us alone, but will remind us always that we are guided by love on every step of our lives."

That's the guide into our deliberate life. A loving God who chose us, blessed us, and will help us be that ongoing blessing to others.

So, we are then able to say...Today and tomorrow I will be guided by God's blessing. Today and tomorrow I will be God's love. Amen.