SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Nu’uanu Congregational Church

Jeannie D. Thompson

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*“Divine Agendas and Jesus’ Schedule”* Luke 13:31-35

A few chapters earlier than this, in Luke’s chapter nine, Jesus has a mountain-top experience wherein he is transfigured—his face and his clothes shone, and Moses and Elijah appear beside him. The two prophets commiserate with Jesus about his departure in Jerusalem, and the disciples who went up the mountain with him hear a voice from heaven declaring Jesus as God’s Son, and the Chosen One to whom we must listen.

Shortly after his Transfiguration, Luke tells us that he “set his face toward Jerusalem.” In other words: Jesus has set a travel itinerary for himself and in the chapters that follow we see him resolutely following it.

Here, in chapter 13 and the passage we just heard, some Pharisees try to warn him off from going to Jerusalem. Herod is looking for you, they tell him, and he wants to kill you! The suggestion is that Jesus should alter his itinerary, should flee—for Herod and his whole family were murderous and cruel. This particular Herod—Herod Tetrarch—has already executed John the Baptist. Jesus would do well to listen to their advice.

Instead, what we find out in this passage is that he not only has an itinerary, Jesus has also provided himself with a schedule. And so, in verse 32, he tells the Pharisees: *I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will finish my work.* [v.32] It is almost as if he had a list and was going through it.

Finally, in addition to sharing his agenda for the next few days, Jesus also takes the time to acknowledge Herod’s presence in his life, and Herod’s reputation for being devious and predatory. He knows he is in danger, but he does not, and will not, alter his plans.

Indeed, besides the threat of Herod’s violence, Jesus also suggests that Jerusalem, itself, is not a place of honor and safety. Rather, Jerusalem is the place that *“kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!”* [v. 34a]

He knows about Jerusalem, and yet in the very same breath, Jesus expresses his deep love for Jerusalem. He knows who the people are. He knows what will happen to him in Jerusalem, but instead of turning away, Jesus does more than simply continue onward. He continues on his journey to the cross with a heart filled with compassion and love.

He continues to bring forth God’s ways and God’s desire for healing and wholeness for the people. And so, even in the face of his own destruction and death, demons are cast out, hurts are cured, lives are restored because nothing stops Jesus, not even actual death.

In the face of death and Empire Jesus is even inspired to use a specifically tender, especially maternal illustration of God. *“How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”* [v. 34]

This is not the usual way of expressing power. This power—Jesus’ power—saves and protects, it is creative, even sacrificial, rather than cruel, coercive or violent. It does not hoard, rob, it is not selfish, nor envious.

The Apostle Paul best describes this power Jesus has, this powerful love of Jesus, in his first letter to the Corinthians. Many of you can recite this passagw and it goes like this:

*4Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

Jesus’ power is love, and his love is expressed in his schedule and his agenda. Both are all about life—about bringing life, blessing life, loving and honoring life.

In this moment in the life of the world, we are especially tasked by what this all can mean. There are so many things happening on the national and international stage that tell us that the dark ways of the world, the ways of Empire, of a new imperialism, of an old desire for domination—all of these things seem to be on the rise.

The truth of the matter is that we have never been free of them…yet we might be if only we could allow ourselves to help one another, if only we could get past our own doubts, suspicions, and fears.

Jesus’ gentle illustration of wanting to gather-up the very people he knows will bring about his death is wonderful and good, but I wonder how many of us are capable of really recognizing and acknowledging Jesus as the source of such goodness. Do we really *believe* with all our being that Jesus can and will protect us, keep us and our loved ones safe?

Yesterday, as I was driving home, I could not get across the three lanes of traffic to the left turn arrow. So, I did what I usually do when traffic is heavy: I drove up to the right lane to Laimi Street and turned into the neighborhood. If you follow the road, you come out by the Boy Scout headquarters, across the street from the road up to the Oahu Country Club.

It’s always a nice break from the traffic along Pali Highway.

Yesterday, as I was in the last block before the light—right beside the Boy Scout headquarters—a couple of tiny little balls of fluff (two baby chicks) darted out in front of the car. I slowed down to let them get to the other side of the road. Chickens crossing to the other side of the road, there is a joke in there somewhere! I assumed the mother hen was on the side they were rushing toward. However, as I came abreast of them, they darted back to the other side of the road!

Luckily, the light was still red and I was going very slowly. As I pulled up to the light and looked back in the rearview mirror, I could see the outline of the hen gathering back her wayward chicks.

I wonder how many of us are like that? We know where our comfort and protection are located but we find ourselves running in every direction but the right one—every direction but toward God’s promise of life through the life, death, and *resurrection* of Jesus the Christ.

This is what we are meant to ponder, to pray for, and to move toward. This is what our life with Christ is always about, but it is what we especially what we are meant to meditate on during Lent. We are a resurrection people.

We believe in a Christ who God made the first born of the dead; the one who whose love could not be contained in a grave, but whose love rose and came forth, and is with us still.

There is so much—so many in our world thirsting for resurrection. What do you think could happen if we all took refuge under the wing of our God who is longing to gather us up so we can ***reflect resurrection*** in a world that’s tearing itself apart? What would it take for us to surrender, to humble ourselves that completely?

As we continue on with Jesus to Jerusalem…and Calvary, let us pray that this will be our truth: that all people are Beloved children of God adopted into God’s holy family, marked with the cross of Christ, and sealed with the Holy Spirit forever.

And let this be our prayer for our journey. It is a prayer written by ELCA pastor, the Rev. Jenny Sung:

*Lord, we pray that we will boldly bear witness to the Holy Spirit of Christ and his power and deep desire to cast out the demons of racism, hate, division, tribalism, hunger, classism, and pride.*

*If we have pride, may it be in our Mother Hen who gathers us. If we hunger, may it be for God’s justice. If we hate, may it be toward anything that tries to distance us from this source of abundant life. Let us pray that Christ will work through our lives to cure what is hurting.*

*We pray all of this in the powerful name of Jesus so that the dome in which God reigns is reflected on this side of eternity.*

*And in this holy season, may we notice where we are running. And by the grace of God may it be toward the cross.*

Amen.