

On February 24, 2013, the Second Sunday of Lent, Pastor Joel delivered this sermon, "Obstacles on the Journey" based on Luke 13:31-35. The other scriptures for the day included Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; and Psalm 27.

Lent is a journey. It is meant to be a journey that we take inside ourselves. A journey that is meant to lead us to insight and revelation about who we are and what we are about. Lent is an opportunity for learning and experiencing the presence of God in ways we have not before. It is a time to dig deeper, to explore the meaning of who we want to become. It is a time to look closely at ourselves and discern what about us is real and what it is that we perhaps have just been putting on for others, those parts of us we may finally decide to just let go, so that we can live more honestly, openly and more freely. Lent is a journey.

Jesus was on a journey. After Peter had confessed him to be the Christ, the Son of God, and after the experience of the Transfiguration, his glorification on the mountain, he was ready to move on. His identity was now complete and he was ready to move on. To journey toward Jerusalem.

For he had said to his disciples that the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And this would happen in Jerusalem. Jesus was on a journey. A journey toward Jerusalem.

But there seemed to be obstacles on this journey. You might think that his disciples would have wanted to derail what seemed to be a suicidal mission. But it wasn't them. Maybe they never quite understood what it was he was actually trying to tell them. Even at the end, the night before he would be betrayed, tried and crucified, his disciples didn't seem to really know what was going on. That the cross loomed just ahead. They didn't seem to know.

And we would have been just the same.

But there were obstacles. One was named Herod Antipas. The son of Herod the Great, the one who the Gospel of Matthew tells us wanted to kill the infant Jesus. Here is his son, the one who had already killed John the Baptist, who apparently had it out for Jesus as well. Or so at least said the Pharisees.

Now the Pharisees, they were a whole other story. For some time, Luke's gospel has had Jesus arguing with some of the Pharisees and lawyers and others from the religious establishment. They've been upset with his disrupting the Sabbath services of worship with his healing performances and his accusations that they are hypocrites for their obsessive concern for following of the Mosaic law and lack of concern about caring for the poor and vulnerable around them.

But Jesus seemed to have a pretty good grip on these obstacles. He wasn't too concerned about that old fox Herod. And the Pharisees, he seemed actually to have a longing for them to come to him, to understand him, to join him in welcoming this kingdom of God, this reign of God's Spirit that was all around them but which they seemed too blind to see.

It was to the Pharisees, the Temple Priests and all who over the course of history seemed to lead Jerusalem away from her God, *"killing the prophets and stoning those sent to you"*, that he spoke when he grieved over Jerusalem. And then he spoke of how God longed to gather them as a *"mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings"* but they would not be gathered. And then he would add, *"Behold, your house is forsaken."* A clear reference to

the Temple and the corruption he saw that had taken hold there. They had made themselves obstacles, not only to him but to God.

But these were outside obstacles easily managed. The difficulty would have been the obstacles of the inner journey. Like the temptations in the wilderness after his baptism, during those 40 days and nights when he dealt with the devil, Jesus would continue to have to wrestle with those same temptations. Temptations to feed only himself and forget about feeding the masses. Temptations to use his miraculous powers to impress and gain the popularity of the people rather than to heal and bring wholeness to individuals in need. Temptations to power to become the military Messiah who would lead the revolt against Herod and Rome and ultimately rule the nations. All the temptations that could easily take him off his course toward Jerusalem, the way of the suffering servant with which he identified and the cross which awaited him there.

So how did Jesus overcome these obstacles? In Luke, more than any other gospel, Jesus prays. As in the 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus overcomes his temptations, gains strength and recovers in prayer. As when he went up the mountain at his Transfiguration, he realizes his identity and calling in prayer. As when he was in need of rest and re-energizing, he went off to a quiet place with his disciples in prayer. As on the Mount of Olives before his arrest, he overcomes his distress and uncertainty and recommits himself to his mission through prayer. Jesus prayed to attune himself with God. To restore and strengthen his relationship to God whom he knew intimately as a loving father and a protective mother.

We know Jesus memorized and prayed the Psalms. Biblical scholar N.T. Wright suggests that he may have been praying Psalm 91 in the wilderness when the devil tempted him with a part of that very psalm. This should warn us that temptations can arise even out of our most fervent prayers, out of our deepest hopes and dreams. That we need God's presence and direction even here.

This past week, as I was studying Luke's passages on the temptation, I had a revelation. I realized that even parts of the Lord's Prayer can be seen in those temptations - the request to *"give us this day our daily bread"*; his prayer to *"lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil"*; and the recognition that God alone is *"the kingdom, the power and the glory."* We need to be clear, even in our prayers, who's will it is that we are seeking.

As he faced his obstacles, Jesus may well have prayed today's psalm: *"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"* And he would have known well those closing words, *"Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the Lord!"*

We are on a journey. And as we journey through this Lent, may we be strong and take courage as we *"wait for the Lord."* May we overcome our own obstacles through prayer, both alone and with one another. And may we be intentional about seeking out our God, restoring and strengthening that inner relationship that we have, the guidance of that Spirit of Christ with which we are so blessed. Amen.