

2nd Sunday in Lent – Year C

Pr. Danielle DeNise

Sunday, March 13, 2022

Do you have that place? That place where you go and your spirit feels at home? That place where you know the contours of the corners? Where your soul breathes and rests? The place where your story seems written into it?

Maybe its your local congregation. Maybe your grandmother's front porch. Maybe it's the oak tree in a park. Or the feel of sand and ocean waters on your toes.

It's a place that no matter what journey you take, your life still circles around it. Your stories forever intertwined.

Jerusalem is a place that Jesus' life circled around. Although not born there, he was dedicated in the temple. When he was lost, his parents found him teaching in Jerusalem. Then when he encounters the Devil in the wilderness, Jerusalem is part of the temptation. And then in chapter 9 of Luke, we encounter Jesus setting his face to Jerusalem.

There is nowhere that this more evident than in the gospel of Luke. In fact the author of Luke-Acts names Jerusalem. The whole rest of the NT only mentions it 50.

Although Jesus has been part of God's mission in healing, casing out demons – now the mission crystalizes. Jerusalem. Jerusalem.

Jerusalem. The center of the Jewish world.

It is in this place – where Jesus was dedicated that Jesus would also be crucified. And it is in this place that the mission of God to open the way

of love and life everlasting, the way of relationship would be given to the whole of humanity.

And Herod is having none of it. This upstart prophet, this Jesus is wrecking his vibe. His power. Making him feel uncomfortable. All this human liberation is getting in the way of Roman occupation. And the pharisees (weird -its them, right?) come to warn him. Go another place. Herod is after you. Not Jerusalem.

And its clear that Jesus's journey albeit indirect won't be deterred.

"Go tell that fox, I'm on a mission from God."

As commentator James Burns shared, "Jesus does not respond to the threat of violence with fear. His connection with his mission is so clear that even a predatory fox like the king can be ignored. I am doing what God has called me to do, he says: healing today, exorcising tomorrow, and finishing on the third day."

Jesus is on a mission from God. And nothing can deter him.

Can we stop there for just a moment and give thanks? For a God whose love is so persistent. For a God whose primary goal was always open arms to all of humanity. Like the mother hen, like the outstretched arms on the cross.

Y'all, I don't know about you. But I can be deter. I can run when it gets hard. I can stop when my spirit starts feeling anxious or comfortable. And yet, God is undeterred. God in Jesus the Christ is on the move.

Now you might be tempted to miss understand this sermon – to think the message is just preserve, ignore the haters. And perhaps beloved, God is put something so deeply in your heart that is the message. And yet for most of us, I think the message this day isn't just try hard. Do more. Persevere.

I think the message is that God already has.

God has already looked Herod in the face and said – “You are not the end of the story.”

God has already overcome execution on a cross and said “You are not end of the story.”

God has already looked upon everyone of our worst things and said, “You are not the end of the story.”

And beloved, maybe that's what you need to hear today. Your God has already persisted. Your story is still being written. Written out of ashes. Written out of dashed dreams. Written out of exhausted best intentions.

God in Jesus set his face to Jerusalem so that we could turn our face to our neighbor and offer love.

God in Jesus set his face to Jerusalem so that we could be gathered in like a mother so loved so that we could in turn gather in God's other beloveds.

God in Jesus set his face to Jerusalem so that we could set our face towards love, love that has shown up as strollers at the bus station for Ukranian refuges.

Full disclosure beloveds. I read this text this week and thought, “What the heck do this even mean?” I ended in a place that felt tender – like that mother hen. A place where we were gathered in again to hear Jesus say, “I love you. I have persisted. I have taken on every empire and oppressor so that you might know you are beloved.” Perhaps that’s why we need a text like this in Lent. A time when we are hearing hard truths. We are naming wilderness places. We are learning into the shadows. And even in the midst of it, our God – our mother – is gathering us in saying “You are my beloved.”