**Persevering for the Mission**

Lent II March 13, 2022

Luke 13: 31-35 Russell Mitchell-Walker

This week we reach the two year anniversary of the beginning of the global pandemic. Through these past two years we have been on a roller coaster of five different waves of the COVID-19 virus, and almost as many changes in restrictions and openings. Through it all it has been patience, vigilance, diligence, and perseverance that has helped us make it this far. We continue to persevere even as things open up, because we now know what to do to keep one another safe, as we continue to move through the end of this fifth wave. We will persevere!

In today’s gospel, Jesus is heading toward Jerusalem, knowing that it is his mission and goal, and will not be turned aside from moving forward. He is determined to persevere. Even when some Pharisees warn him that Herod, who rules the area of Galilee, wants to kill him, he is clear that he is not done with his ministry and will continue. Now it may seem odd that Pharisees are warning Jesus about Herod being after him, because Pharisees are often portrayed in the scriptures as challenging Jesus and not being supportive of him. While this is true, it is also true in the stories of the gospel that Jesus has Pharisees who are his friends and support him. This is likely a group of supporters. They know and understand Jesus’ message and also worry, as do his disciples, that heading to Jerusalem will most certainly mean imminent death for him. In essence they were also telling him to turn aside or turn back from his mission or goal. Some of them were probably comfortable and didn’t want Jesus upsetting that, through the challenges they knew he might be making in Jerusalem and so they tell him to ‘turn back’.

Maybe some of us have experienced similar situations. Maybe you find out about something unethical at work and you want to report the concern but others around you say don’t do it, “turn back”. Or maybe you report harassment that you have experienced, and are told it was nothing, just a joke, not to worry about it. It’s hard to go against the status quo but that is just what Jesus did. It is a risk. Threats and likelihood of death would not deter him from what he knew God was calling him to do.

By being part of a worshiping community, we make a covenant to support that community, the people, the programs, the ministry. Faithful discipleship involves living out a commitment, risk, and challenge. We have a vision of Open Minds, Open Hearts, Open Doors claiming ourselves as a progressive church, naming ourselves as an Affirming Ministry and seeking to live out the radical welcome of all. By claiming a progressive faith, we disrupt the status quo. By being an Affirming Ministry and seeking to challenge issues such as homophobia, racism, sexism, and economic exploitation we disrupt the status quo. This is an important part of our mission and covenant together as a community of faith at Eastside.

I invite you to keep this in mind as we move through our financial meeting after worship today. As Jesus moved toward Jerusalem, there would have been some anxiety, some discomfort knowing what he knew. This was his lamentation for Jerusalem. He sees it can be so much more and he just wants to gather the people like a mother hen and protect them. But he can’t because they have made different choices. They are supporting the system, the empire, that goes against the message he is proclaiming. It can be a challenge to be faithful and that challenge can include financial. As we consider our financial stewardship there can be discomfort in how we ask for money. There can be discomfort in talking about needing more money than we are getting in. I hope that we have become more comfortable in hearing about our financial needs and celebrating the generosity we experience with gratitude. In recent years, we have had some serious financial challenges that we have come through and we have persevered. We continue to have challenges meeting our budget and we also have been able to maintain close to a three month balance of expenses, which is a very positive thing. We could do better in growing our budget and financial base so we are functioning more out of mindset of abundance rather than scarcity. Committee budgets don’t have much room to grow. We have increased costs for offering our worship online. As we move forward, we celebrate the generosity that enables us to continue our ministry and pray for the growth to enrich our ministries. We celebrate the benefit of sharing this space with two other congregations, which significantly alleviates our costs.

Jesus mourns over Jerusalem because they have chosen scarcity over divine abundance. This is the challenge for the church. Many congregations are struggling financially and can become to fixated on whether they will make the budget. I was at a congregation where many years there was a deficit budget but almost every year they came out ahead financially. But during budget time it was the scarcity of the deficit that won the focus rather than the reality of abundance. We live in abundance. There is enough for all. This will be the reality when we truly believe it and live it out. Living with an abundance mindset is counter-cultural, we may be told to ‘turn back’ to be cautious. Moving forward is faithful, facing the challenges with hope and courage. May we be up to the challenge, persevering to live out our vision and commitments, knowing God is with us and so we will not be turned aside. Amen.