

The Second Sunday of Lent
St. Luke 13:31-35
March 17, 2019
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Self-Preservation

At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."

It was no secret that the words Jesus spoke, even his mere presence threatened the powers that be. Those words of Jesus challenged the status quo. Herod was doing everything he could to protect himself and his reign on the throne. Those around him wanted to protect their own security which depended upon Herod. If the guy at the top fell from power, he would fall on them. They knew their position and security was tenuous. It was a question of self-preservation.

Imagine the frustration of God as God walked into this way of living and tried to educate us about a better way. Barriers and stumbling blocks were thrown up everywhere to thwart him. No one wanted to change the status quo. It's not that they liked it, but any change, not to mention the radical words of Jesus and what they implied about change, threatened their security in their minds. Better the devil you know than the one you don't. How often have we heard that one? However, the devil is never a good choice for anyone's security or self-preservation.

You cannot force anyone to love you. God knows this. You cannot make someone love you. Love is a free choice and a gift which no one deserves, but is freely given. What kind of relationship can anyone have with someone who would try to hold you, force you, to be in a relationship with them? It defies logic. It defies the definition of a real relationship with someone else. That is why God created us to be free, free to choose to love God, or free to choose not to love God. And even then, God gives us plenty of chances to change our minds, right up until we draw our last breath.

'He who would save his life will lose it, but he who will give his life for my sake and the Gospel's will gain it.' [Luke 9:24] Remember those words? Don't they ring true in light of the situation we read this morning? Those who are trying to save themselves by preserving the status quo will lose their lives, worse yet, their souls.

We too worry about our safety. We worry about financial security both now and in the future. We worry about job security, that through no fault of our own, we will lose our livelihood. We worry about the security of our relationships. We worry about the security of our families in a crazy, violent and indulgent world. We worry about the security of our homes. Alarm companies are doing a bang-up business these days—better than ever. To put it simply, we worry about avoiding and escaping from trouble. It is part of human instinct. We are hard wired for it. Survival is a most important motivator.

There are times when our personal anxiety gets the better of us and we worry about bad things happening to us or bad things being said about us. This is very human also. It too is part of being human to worry about those who are out to “get” us. If “they are against us, who is for us?” [see Luke 9:50]

God knew who was for Him and who was against Him, yet he hoped they might change their hearts and love God. No matter the challenge, Jesus would try, because this is what he came into the world to do. Hope springs eternal! Anyone can change, and it is never too late. Pius legend has it that even Pontius Pilate became a Christian in his later years. And I, I am not yet a Christian, but I am still trying to be one. There is hope for me and for every one of us.

He who would save his life... The instinct of self-preservation runs very strong in each of us. To save my life, I must risk it. I must be prepared to give it away to and for others. I must let go of my death grip on the status quo and make the Tom Cruise leap of faith, flying through the air until I grasp something really solid. The cross of Christ is that solid place. Hold fast to that, it will not let you down. It will preserve your life. It is our life-preserver.

Jesus replied, “Go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’ Jesus was not deterred by Herod. Jesus did not stop and focus on his own safety. He did not adopt a plan for self-preservation. He did not have a “bug-out” donkey. He did not have a bunker to hide in if his life was in peril. He did not have a bug-out bag. Yet Jesus was prepared, come what may. He was prepared to carry on his ministry until he completed it, despite the opposition of Herod the King. And He did so boldly.

For Jesus, self-preservation meant things like loyalty and authentic living and being. For Jesus, self-preservation meant loving. For Jesus, the journey was about self-giving, and ultimately, God gave over His whole self for each of us. That is why we are here this morning.

Our Journey is from self-preservation to self-giving also. Lent is an opportunity for us to change! AMEN