

Last Sunday Luke's gospel led us into the wilderness with Jesus to wrestle with that which desires to separate us from God. Today we find ourselves with Jesus on the road, on his way. The gospel of Luke is structured largely as a roadway. For the first eight chapters of this gospel Jesus is roaming around Galilee, healing and teaching and generally annoying the religious elite in a fairly random way. But in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter the evangelist writes: "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, [Jesus] set his face to go to Jerusalem." Jesus hits the road, a very particular road, and he does not deviate from this way. Luke devotes the next ten chapters to this journey – an extraordinary amount compared to just a few chapters in Matthew or Mark. In this large portion of Luke's gospel Jesus invites those on the margins of the road to follow on his way. Samaritans are invited. Lepers are invited. Samaritan lepers are invited. Jerusalem is the destination for those on this road; Jerusalem, that place where the old covenant will meet the new, where rigid piety and literalism will meet God's subversion, where promise will become reality. Luke is especially concerned with that road that leads to God's reality; he wants us to know what the way to Jerusalem looks like, the bumps and curves of that path, the length and breadth of that journey. And so we find ourselves this morning on that dusty road, hearing about what lies ahead.

Jesus is roughly at the midpoint of his journey when some Pharisees approach him. This may be about the only positive light thrown on the Pharisees in Luke's gospel. They tell Jesus to beware of Herod. Herod – who reigns and dwells in Jerusalem – wants Jesus dead. The Pharisees say, "Leave this road. Be afraid. Fear this way." It seems the road is a dangerous place.

Jesus responds by calling Herod a fox. Herod is a creature of great slyness, cunning, and voracious destruction. Jesus tells the Pharisees to journey to Jerusalem themselves to tell "that fox" that Jesus "MUST be on this way." There is no choice for him. Jesus frames the journey he is taking figuratively as a three-day movement: healing today and tomorrow and the third day he will be finished. Jesus goes on to acknowledge what "finished" might mean, noting that "it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem." The prophets Zechariah, Uriah, the opponents of King Mannaseh, and many others all perished in that holy city, stoned to death. Jesus knows what lies ahead for him.

And so he offers a lament for Jerusalem. This holy city, whose name literally and ironically means "foundation of peace," has become for Jesus the city that kills and stones those who carry God's words of repentance and change. But rather than condemnation Jesus offers this prayer of lamentation. And Jesus uses this beautiful language of mothering compassion to describe his yearning for Jerusalem. I love this image of Jesus – of God – as mother. Jesus may be borrowing from Isaiah, who wrote, "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (an ironic twist to that for Jesus). And he combines this mothering image with the imagery of a bird, a hen to be more precise. We have all seen chicks go scurrying to their mother when threatened. Perhaps you have seen hens charge the threat with wings outstretched, as fearsome an NFL linebacker, only to turn back to the chicks to nurture and care for them. Jesus longs for this relationship with the children of Jerusalem. He will go to that holy city with the intent of gathering them together to love them always. He must! What he will find there will be foxes, cunning and voracious.

Here is the interesting twist in all of this for us: those for whom Jesus prays and longs to take up in his arms and shield and nurture include Herod, Caiaphas, Annas, and all those who will surrender him up to the cross. There is this juxtaposition between the outer reality of the danger and murderous intent that awaits Jesus, and the inner reality that for Jesus – God incarnate – he MUST go to them to love them. This is the way of the road to Jerusalem. Jesus

knows of the danger and the likelihood of his death; he also knows that his death is not the end of love. Love conquers fear and death. Perhaps those three days to which Jesus earlier refers makes most sense in terms of the healing intended through his death, which will be finished through the reconciliation gained in his resurrection on the third day. Herod will not have the last word. Love will. Love must.

You know, the way to Jerusalem is not just Jesus' to walk; this road is ours as well. I suspect we all have our own Jerusalem deep within us, a city named "foundation of peace," but ruled by our own version of Herod. We want to be kings and queens, each of us, in our own way. This is part of the human condition, universal to all. We want control, power, security, praise on our own terms, for us alone. Herod may loom large or small within each of us; but the tyrant is there. I know this all too well for myself. My Herod is sly, and cunning, and his appetite is voracious. Now the point of acknowledging my Herod is not to make me feel guilty. Guilt for the sake of guilt is an empty meal. But that inner tyrant is a part of my reality, and until I can name my Herod I can have no peace. My Jerusalem will continue to try to stone to death that which desires wholeness and joy for me.

Jesus will not have such inner death be the last word. Love MUST respond. Love does respond. And thanks be to God! Jesus is a larger part of our reality; I don't care how big your Herod looms in your life; Christ is larger! And Mother Jesus will not leave us with rocks in our hands, ready to stone what might topple our inner tyrant. Jesus did not conquer Herod through might and political warfare. Jesus conquered Herod through love. Mother Jesus stretched out his wings over all his brood – including Herod and Caiaphas and Annas and all tyrants – to embrace us all in God's love. His death on the cross was not the end of his journey. His resurrection was and continues to be the endpoint of the walk to Jerusalem.

And so we walk to this dusty road with the intent of healing and reconciliation. To have Christ in us – as we all have – is to walk that walk. But we do so one step at a time, step by trembling step. God will have us, each of us, every bit and piece of you and me. It would be nice if we could just hand ourselves over to God in one lump, like one big loaf of bread, slapped down on the table "Here you go, Lord. That's all of me. There is nothing left." God wants that loaf; there is no doubt; every bit and crumb God longs to have. But there is Herod, and Herod will not let go easily. So we surrender to God in increments: a slice here, a crumb there. When you stay late at your job to help a co-worker who is dealing with problems at home and cannot quite get their work done – and you would much rather be in your own house in your favorite chair with your feet up watching American Idol. When you cross the street to give a dollar to a homeless woman when you would much rather stay on your side and walk a little faster. When you drop off a casserole because you think it is the right thing to do for a sick neighbor, and stay for two hours because he is elderly and lonely and needs to talk. When you speak the word of forgiveness when all the power lies in holding the grudge. Morsel by morsel, crumb by crumb, we give ourselves to our God. This is the way to Jerusalem. It is not especially glorious: just a series of mini-surrenders. Bit by bit we hand over our crusty surfaces and crumbling exteriors, our risen interiors and fragrant goodness. Bit by bit we feed our world, those who stand waiting along the way. We become God's bread. And in the course our Herod becomes exposed for the petty tyrant that he/she is, miniscule and powerless beside the grace and glory of God's love. And the stones drop from our hands. Jerusalem is restored. We become a foundation of peace.