



March 5 Ash Wednesday

Some say that the deepest of grief, is discovering you waited too long. That may be not saying what you wanted to say to someone. It could be waiting too long to realize your priorities. Maybe it is taking a relationship for granted until it is too late. There are a variety of ways this plays out. In the end, it is deep grief because you know that it did not have to be that way. If only...

At the start of this text, Jesus sets his eyes toward Jerusalem. This sets the tone for everything else that happens in the Gospel according to Saint Luke. Jesus is focused on Jerusalem and what will take place there. This is late enough in his earthly ministry that Jerusalem has come into focus. There are plots against him. He knows well what lies ahead. He invites people to journey to the cross with him.

The disciples see that others are not on board with this endeavor, and they respond with one of the craziest remarks a follower of Christ could mutter. "Do you want us to command fire down from heaven?" Let's pause there for a second. Hopefully you can all recognize that this is the OPPOSITE of what Jesus would want to happen. As such, Jesus rebukes them. It should be a reminder to all of us as there are those who would wish ill will on others in the name of Jesus. That is not how it works with God. We are called to love one another. Period. End of story.

The story then focuses on those who are sympathetic to the cause but have things to do first. These are admirable things. Some wish to bury their dead. Others wish to say goodbye to family and friends first. At first glance, Jesus seems rather cold and callous. It is important to take a step back. What if Jesus' response is not so much about the individuals as it is about communal readiness? Communally, we come up with excuses. We look for extensions. We look for the perfect opportunity to respond before we take the first step. As Dr. McGarrah Sharp points out in the devotional materials, "How long will humanity ask for extensions? How long will we say 'Hold up. I'm almost ready.'"

Jesus' eyes are focused on Jerusalem. Jesus is focused on making sure that ALL are included. Jesus is focused on breaking down the barriers that the Church had constructed, those rules and divisions that keep some on the outside while others enjoy the perks of the temple system. Jesus sees abusive systems that are keeping people oppressed. He is focused on change.

If Jesus were here in the flesh, where would his focus be. Would he set his eyes on the Church, and worship attendance, or which hymns we sing? Or would he turn his face toward the Capitol? State or Federal? I tend to imagine Jesus would set his eyes on the Capitol and stand in solidarity with those who are marginalized in our society. I imagine Jesus would send messengers ahead, asking us to follow him...calling us to join the journey to the cross.

How would we respond? Our response is often a lot like those in the text. "Let me take care of this first, then I am all in. This week is really booked, but next week should be better. I don't think the church should be political." The longer we wait, the more we risk waiting too long. Jesus reminds the people that the time is now. No waiting. No excuses. If you wait, it may be too late.

Is the timing perfect. No. Is there a lot of work to do between action and advocacy. Absolutely. Yet, Lent is here whether we are ready or not. The work is before us, whether we are ready or not. How will we respond to the call to follow? Will we do what we can with what we have? Or will we wait? Amen

Pastor Michael Schmidt