

February 27, 2010 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent Luke 13:31-35

What is your main goal or mission in life? One popular author asks his readers to go through the following exercise: **"Picture going to a funeral. As you walk down to the front and look inside the casket, you suddenly come face to face with yourself. This is your funeral. Now think deeply. What would you want the people to say about you and your life? What kind of husband, wife, father or mother, son or daughter would you like their words to reflect? What character would you like them to remember in you? Look carefully at the people around you. What difference would you like to have made in their lives?"**

Suddenly success isn't "having it made" in an earthly sense. It isn't the size of your home, the amount of money you worked so hard for, or the number of things you achieved. It's your relationships with people you love. But wait, in that scenario, we need to add someone else. What would God say if He were speaking at your funeral? In our reading today Jesus helps us answer the big question: **Why are you living? What Is Your Mission in Life?**

Jesus was in the northern area of Palestine under the control of King Herod. A group of Pharisees advised, **"Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."** Were they really concerned about Christ? Mark's Gospel tells us they were plotting with King Herod's supporters to kill Jesus (3:6). They no doubt wanted Jesus to go to Jerusalem where He wasn't as popular. There they could whip up the people against Christ to bring about His death.

Jesus replied, **"Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"** Jesus knew Herod's cunning and scheming. But He would go to Jerusalem to die as the sacrifice for the sins of the world and rise from the dead as victorious Lord and King on God the Father's time table. No earthly King could get in the way of that. Besides, as Old Testament history had shown time and again, God's true prophets don't die in northern Palestine, but in Jerusalem, the center of Judaism and its self-righteous rejection of God's mercy and grace.

What is your mission in life? Is winning the school popularity contest your goal? Are you hoping for a measure of happiness, health, material success, and strong family bonds as the ultimate goal of life? Do you want your children to get the best education so they can make the most comfortable living? Do you want them to win the most outstanding athlete award so they have a shot at the big leagues? Are you just living for the weekend and its parties? For the lusts, desires, or greedy impulses of the flesh? For some retirement dream lifestyle? Is your loyalty to Jesus perhaps getting in the way of your goals because you feel the need to win the admiration of the King Herod's in today's world, those who seem to be the ones getting all the things this world has to offer?

It may look as though the Herod's of this world win out with their power, glamour, and wealth. It may look like Jesus failed since He died and death and persecution follow His believers throughout history. But the Bible clearly teaches, **"The world and its desires pass away. But the man who does the will of God lives forever!"** All earthly causes will pass away. Jesus died *and rose*. He promises on the basis of His death and resurrection that your sins are forgiven and by faith in Him you will live with Him forever in heaven. That cause will one day triumph, Christ's death and resurrection guarantees it.

Go back again to our introduction. What would you want others to say at your funeral? What would you want Jesus to say? In Revelation 2:10, Jesus encourages His suffering church, **“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life!”** God grant that Jesus would say at our funeral, "He or she trusted in Me. Now you who are mourning his passing, dry your tears and believe that I have given my disciple the crown of life in heaven! You see, Jesus focused on the Father's mission to win eternal life for us, although it meant His bitter suffering and death. And on the third day He rose as victory over sin and death! What is your life's mission? Focus on the Father's mission, for He wants you to be in heaven by faith in Jesus.

All this talk about eternity is fine – for the future. But how can I know the earthly goals Jesus wants to give me? Reach a God-pleasing Goal in this life. Focus on Jesus and His Word.

We hear Jesus lament in our reading, **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you. How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”** Jesus compared His efforts to save the people of Jerusalem to that of a bird protecting her brood from the attacks of a predator. But you will read no more tragic words in all of scripture than these, "You were not willing!" The majority of the people of Jerusalem, holding to their own proud dreams about a restored kingdom on earth, rejected God's promises of life through His Son. **“Your house is left to you desolate,”** Jesus warned. God was no longer their in their temple worship. And what a sad prophecy of the final and permanent fate unbelievers will suffer – the absence of God in hell. .

But at the end of this age those who believe in Jesus will declare, **“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,”** when He returns in glory. God wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Welcome Jesus as today He comes to you in Word and Sacrament to give you faith and protect you in your faith from all the attacks of the devil, the world, and your unbelieving flesh. Then you will be among those who welcome Him in joy when He returns in glory.

But our heart by nature stubbornly resists Jesus. By the grace of God, however, He sent His Spirit into our hearts by the Gospel in Word and sacrament. He has given us a new heart. Now he daily urges us, **“You were taught to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”** (Eph. 4:24). God credits us with Jesus' righteousness and has given us an inheritance in heaven, which will never perish, soil, or fade. Be renewed daily in your faith by confessing when you do wrong and by trusting God forgives you of all sin for Jesus' sake. You and I are now in Christ a new creation, with new hope, new love, new peace, new joy, new values, and new power enabling us to live according to our heavenly Father's commands. What is your mission in life? Focus on Jesus' Word, and His Spirit will keep you focused on the Father's eternal mission for your life, and the good things you can do to glorify Him throughout your earthly journey. Then when you leave this world, regardless of what anyone else will say about you at your funeral, you will hear the Lord will commend you, **“Well done, good and faithful servant. Come and share your Master's happiness!”** Amen.