

February 28, 2010

The Second Sunday of Lent

Luke 13:31-35

All Saints' Episcopal Church

The Rev'd Elizabeth Shows Caffey, associate rector

When I was growing up, my family always went to the beach for our vacation. We frequently went with this one other family whose kids were about the same ages as my brothers, my sister and I. The first time that we vacationed at Bald Head Island none of us really knew what we were getting ourselves into. On Bald Head, there are no cars – the only means of transportation on the island are golf carts, bicycles or your own two feet. We knew this ahead of time, and so the kids had brought our bikes. To get to the island, we had to take a ferry from the mainland over, which required loading our week's worth of supplies onto and then off of the ferry. Once on the island, there was a tram to take all 12 of us, along with all of our luggage to the rental house.

Our bikes were too much to fit on the tram, so the adults decided that they would ride the tram and we kids could follow behind on our bikes. We got ourselves organized, got on our bikes and started peddling and then Zoom! The tram takes-off! We could see it just barely in sight ahead of us as we all raced to try and keep up. Pretty quickly the tram was out of sight, and all eight of us kids, having never been to the island before, were terribly lost. We were very hot. We were tired and cranky from traveling. Most of us had no idea what the name of the cottage was where we were staying. A couple of the older kids stopped to ask some people for directions. We finally decided to split-up: half of us went one way while the other half headed off in a different direction. Eventually we all end up at the rental cottage, red-faced, over-heated, and very angry at our parents... that is all of us except Johnny.

Johnny is special. When he was 9 years old he had a bike accident that caused severe brain damage. Johnny had to learn everything all over again: how to walk, to feed himself, how to communicate. When we realized that Johnny was not at the house, we all went into panic mode. The older kids who had led the two groups began to blame one another "I thought he was with you." "No, I am sure that he was with you when we left." Chaos ensued and various search parties were sent out from the house. Using the golf carts, the bicycles and some maps, we all fanned out to search the island.

My father is the one who found Johnny. When he became separated from the group of kids, Johnny came across a nice couple out for a walk. He befriended them. They tried to help him to remember the name of the house where we were staying, but to no avail. When my father found Johnny instead of the distraught kid he was expecting - Johnny was completely relaxed. He was not worried at all; he somehow knew that eventually he would find his way. My father explained to him how concerned we all had been about him being lost. A huge grin came across Johnny's face and he turned to my father and said, "I once was lost, but now I am found."

That afternoon, Johnny had been thrust unexpectedly onto a solitary journey. One moment in the company of friends and family, the next he was all alone. In a strange place, he traveled down an unfamiliar road towards a destination he did not know. But Johnny trusted. He trusted that the people he met along the way would help guide him; he trusted that there were things to learn along his journey; he trusted that he would eventually find his way.

Trusting in the journey can be so very difficult. Twelve days ago, we embarked upon a journey with Christ towards Jerusalem, towards the horrible drama that will play out in a few short weeks. On his journey, Jesus is not focused on the danger that surrounds him. He is aware of it, but he chooses not to focus on it, he chooses not to be deterred by the very real threats that surround him. Today we hear of the Pharisees who come to warn Jesus that Herod wants to kill him. Instead of becoming distracted by fear, by doubt, instead of turning aside from his ministry, Jesus is resolute. He will not be deterred. Jesus trusts in God and in the journey that God has set him upon. He insists upon continuing his ministry of healing God's people.

As we remember and walk with Christ through the last weeks and days of his life here on earth, we are simultaneously each taking our own journey. It is a different sort of journey, a journey back to the core of our beliefs. During Lent, we are encouraged to take these forty days for a time of self-examination and discovery. Now is the time to strip away all that distracts us, to take off the heavy baggage that weighs us down and readjust our focus back to what is of true importance. With each step we strip away another layer and begin to reveal again our true selves before God. Along the way, we may worry that we, like my friend Johnny, have lost our way, somehow stepped off the path. We may be unsure about whether to trust the people we encounter along the way. Some of us may feel hopelessly lost, worried that we may never find our way back. We may be feeling alone, left behind on this long journey.

But we are not wandering aimlessly or alone. The Holy Spirit, the communion of saints, and this beloved All Saints' community are all with us. And because of this amazing community of the family of God, we have the tools to find our way. Our destination can be found by going back to our center, to our core beliefs. Returning to our core means returning to the promises that we or our godparents made at our baptism. Just before the baptismal covenant the priests asks a series of questions. These can be a good jumping off point where we can begin to discover where we may have stepped off the path, or where we have been walking in circles, and lost our way.

- Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?
- Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?
- Do you put your whole trust in God's grace and love?

We are human. There are going to be times in our lives when we fail to live into these promises. There probably have already been times when we have fallen short, when the life we have been living does not reflect the person of faith we strive to be. It is not easy to take this journey, to practice faithfulness and fidelity to God. We will not always get it

right. And that is okay. When we realize that we have erred, that we have been unfaithful to ourselves and to God, God grants us forgiveness.

This Lenten journey is a time to remind us of who we are and whose we are. We are children of God and we are beloved by God. Lent calls us into a time to look again at the faith that we profess and then set aside, strip away, and tear down all the barriers in our lives that prevent us from living out that faith, the faith that says we will put our whole trust in God's grace and love. Living a life of faith is hard work. It's not a commitment that we just make at our baptism and then are done. It is a commitment we make every day, and even sometimes, it is a commitment we must make every hour, or every minute.

On this Lenten journey, let us not allow ourselves to be distracted by the Pharisees who threaten our lives, but, like Jesus trust in the path that God has set before us. When you need a guide, don't be afraid to open up your prayer book, and turn to the baptismal covenant, and continue the work of centering your life on the faith that we proclaim together. And step by step, let's begin again to live a life that reflects our trust in God's love and grace.