

**+ Luke 13:31-35 + Journey to the Cross: The Road to Jerusalem +
+ 2nd Sunday in Lent + 28 February 2010 +**

The road through the season of Lent often seems so sad and depressing. The banners and paraments go from the bright white and green of Christmas and Epiphany to dark purple and black. Hymns take on a different flavor as major keys become minor and hymn texts focus on Christ's suffering and death. We hear calls to repentance—to turn away from sin, instead of alleluias, but in spite of how somber it all seems, the journey through Lent actually gives us great reason to rejoice.

Of course, what happens at the end of the journey with Christ's suffering and death and resurrection is great reason for praise, but the Lord also provides other reasons to rejoice along the way as we follow him to the cross and empty tomb. Last week we rejoiced at our first stop—a battlefield in the Judean wilderness, where Jesus defeated the tempting attacks of Satan for us. Today, our next stop is right on **THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM**, but there's reason to rejoice here too.

You see, just weeks ago before our journey started, we heard John the Baptizer point to Jesus and tell us all, ***"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*** The Lamb of God, whom every lamb sacrificed on Israel's altars foreshadowed, had finally come to be sacrificed for mankind—sheep who loved to wander from the fold of the holy God. To our sinful natures, his journey to the cross taken so willingly seems so foolish, but in spite of our natural desire to reject him, on the road to Jerusalem, the Lamb still resolves to go to the cross for us! As we consider how the Lamb of God goes willingly to suffer and triumphantly to save in Luke 13, the beautiful words of the hymn we just sang, "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth", will serve as our guide this morning.

"A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, our guilt and evil bearing and, laden with the sins of earth, none else the burden sharing. Goes patient on, grows weak and faint, to slaughter led without complaint, that spotless life to offer, bears shame and stripes and wounds and death, anguish and mockery, and says, 'Willing all this I suffer.'"

After nearly 4000 years of prophecy and expectation, the time had finally come for the Lamb of God to make his way up to Jerusalem for the final Passover. Earlier Luke tells us, ***"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."*** Literally Jesus ***"set his face towards Jerusalem"***. No one was going to stop the Savior from reaching his destination. So Jesus began the long, slow journey from the northern region of Galilee. He passed through the land of the Samaritans, where he proclaimed the good news of salvation to souls who desperately needed it. He continued to preach that good news and heal the sick as he wound his way south through the region ruled by King Herod, who had had John the Baptizer beheaded.

"At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, 'Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.'" You might recall the Pharisees hated Jesus, so why the warning? Perhaps there really were death threats, but they likely wanted Jesus to leave this region where he was very popular and go to Jerusalem where the Pharisees had more support against him. Jesus ignored their hypocrisy and instead wanted Herod to know he would not be stopped, because his time to suffer had not yet come. ***"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.'"***

Jesus, the Lamb of God, would indeed suffer, but not at the hands of Herod. His journey would continue until the Lamb of God endured the slaughter in Jerusalem. ***"In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"*** How amazing that the Lamb willingly goes forth to suffer! After all, he is the all-knowing God. He knew what awaited him once he entered Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. He knew the torment of hell itself—the torment for the sins of all mankind—awaited him on a hill outside the city walls. The hymn said it well. The Lamb goes uncomplaining forth to bear unbelievable shame, the cruel stripes of flogging, anguish as his innocent body and soul are covered with the sins of the world, the mockery of those who should really worship him, and finally, death. The Lamb willingly goes forth to suffer without complaint as he bears all your sins and mine.

Why go through it? Why continue to make his way to Jerusalem where he knows he will suffer extremely and die shamefully? Why go to the city so well known for persecuting and killing the prophets—the messengers whom God himself sent throughout the Old Testament to warn them? Why go forth when he would be rejected by the people and at times, even by us?

The Lamb goes uncomplaining forth because his heart of love compels him. Jesus' attention turns away from the Pharisees and towards the city of Jerusalem to which he has ***"resolutely set out..."*** Hear in his voice his longing love for the lost sheep of Jerusalem. He uses another farm picture to describe that intense love for those who reject him. ***"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!"***

The love of the Lamb of God is like a mother hen who wants to protect her chicks from danger, even if it means sacrificing her life to save them. A farmer once owned a number of hens. Unfortunately one afternoon the hen house burned down. As the farmer picked through the rubble, he came across one hen lying dead near the door to the hen house. Her top feathers were singed brown from the fire and her head lay limp. When he reached to pick up the hen, he felt movement. The hen's four chicks came scurrying out from beneath her burned body. They had survived under the insulation of her wings, even as she died to save them. The chicks likely didn't know any better, but the hen sacrificed herself to rescue them from the fire.

The Savior cries out for those who reject him. He wanted to protect them from the flames of hell, even at the cost of his own life. The Lord wanted to pour out his grace even on those who killed his servants and would soon kill him. How wondrous is the love of the Savior for sinners who reject him! Even though Jerusalem breaks his heart and rejects his love as songs of praise turn to shouts of hate, the Lamb of God still willingly goes forth to suffer.

How wondrous is the love of the Lamb of God for sinners like you and me that he does not reject us as our sins deserve! Every day our Savior longs to spend time with us, to strengthen our faith through his Word. Every week he looks forward to meeting us here in worship. He prepares a beautiful meal for us of his body and blood with bread and wine through the Sacrament. Still it saddens our Savior to see us cause pain to ourselves when we do not spend time with him in Word and Sacrament. It breaks his heart as our patience wears thin. Our kindness grows short. Our love grows cold and we wander helplessly. How awful to hear, then, **"...but you were not willing!"**

In the end, those who continue to reject the Lord will be rejected by the Lord. Rejection of the Lamb of God means desolation, but still the Lord in his love gives us a warning so desolation will not be ours. **"Look, your house is left to you desolate."** Ultimately for Jerusalem, a time would come when Roman legions would overrun the city and no stone would be left on top of another. Those who reject the Lord, like Jerusalem, will be forsaken by God. Their spiritual homes will be left empty and desolate and destroyed in hell.

That's a terrifying thought when you consider how foolish and careless we often are with the Savior's love. We take it so lightly. We take it for granted, but if we continue to do so and always let the sinful nature get what it wants, then the Savior's love could be taken away from us too. What can we do?

"O wondrous Love, what have you done! The Father offers up his Son, desiring our salvation. O Love, how strong you are to save! You make his bed within the grave who built the earth's foundation." Although the Lamb willingly goes forth to suffer, he also goes triumphantly to save. Jesus concludes, **"I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"** I'm sure those words are familiar. Just a couple weeks later, the Lamb of God finally entered Jerusalem and with great fanfare. The people praised him for who he really is—the Son of David and Son of God who deserves praise because he comes to save in the name of the Lord. That triumphal entry was not his victory. No, the triumph of the Lamb of God is in his sacrifice! **"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"**

Centuries before the Psalmist had penned those words in Psalm 118 to praise the One who would bring salvation and redemption through his own sacrifice. Those words of praise are on our lips every time we meet the Lord in his Word. We sing those words before we come to the Lord's Table. They come to mind when we meet him in worship. Blessed is he who comes to bring us peace with God. Blessed is he who willingly goes forth to bear our rejection and take the blame for us so we might live. Blessed is he who triumphantly made his way to the cross and poured out his love through the shedding of his holy blood. Blessed is he who opened the gateway to heaven through his own empty tomb on Easter Sunday.

That brings us to the final verse of the hymn before our journey continues. It is the prayer of the child of God who realizes that Christ's love for the sinner is the only source of forgiveness and life. It is the prayer of the child of God who realizes Christ's love will one day allow him or her to see the full, heavenly glory of the Lamb of God. **"Lord, when your glory I shall see and taste your kingdom's pleasure, your blood my royal robe shall be, my joy beyond all measure! When I appear before your throne, your righteousness shall be my crown; With these I need not hide me. And there, in garments richly wrought, as your own bride I shall be brought to stand in joy beside you."** May God grant it for Jesus' sake! Amen.