

Good News?

Good News...that is the meaning of the narratives we call the gospels. They bring to us the news that we are God's claimed and beloved...even when we fail to respond to what God has revealed to us; those things which offer guidance for the way to live full and abundant lives in relationship with our creator. We have traveled about halfway through the lectionary account of this path that Jesus takes after he has "set his face to Jerusalem." Jesus is still wandering from village to village in the Galilee region when this interaction is described. The narrative beginning at Chapter 9 where Jesus has begun that journey which will have Jerusalem as its final stop is known as the "travel narrative." The route Jesus takes to Jerusalem seems to wander from place to place without any sense of urgency. This "travel" narrative tells us what God's reign looks like. On his travels Jesus proclaims God's nearness by healing, by restoring individuals to their life within community, by teaching the ways of God's kingdom; revealing God's love and vision for all humanity through his interactions and teachings. These teachings are an important part of his mission; as are the healings which make possible the restoration of community for those marginalized from their families or culture. Long before he arrives, Jesus knows that he will face opposition from the religious leaders in Jerusalem. He knows and that the final result of the opposition will be his death. In today's passage he is still in Galilee away from the seat of the world's powers; those powers which will reject and condemn him. While still in Galilee we are told "some Pharisees" come "at that very hour" to speak with him. That very hour is recorded as occurring during Jesus' self-determined work among the people. This portion of Luke contains teachings and healings which Jesus is doing as he makes his way toward Jerusalem. The arrival of "some Pharisees" make it seem that this journey is about to be interrupted with some "bad" news. Today's passage contains two distinct sections. In the first portion we find these Pharisees have come to him with a warning: "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." Throughout the gospel narratives Jesus interacts with various Pharisees and scribes—most of whom are not named. Jesus sometimes dining in their homes as a guest; he sometimes rebuffs them for the legalistic way they represent God to God's people. Although critical of the Pharisees not all of these interactions are hostile. This text does not answer the question as to whether this warning was done to intimidate Jesus; to stop the ministry he was doing or if it was an effort to prevent Herod's malice from reaching him. Jesus is in the middle of his daily ministry of teaching and healing, of proclaiming God's kingdom near through what he is saying and doing so their arrival does present the possibility of interruption in Jesus' activities. It seems an attempt to interrupt what Jesus was doing. This passage however comes in the larger context that Jesus already knows where he is headed and what will be the consequences of that choice. Although the Pharisees might not know it: No warning is necessary to inform Jesus of what was coming. What this passage makes clear is that Jesus is in charge of his own timetable. He is setting the pace for the events to come. Herod may be the ruler over the land for a time, but Jesus is committed to the course he has set. Jesus is determined to complete his mission. Jesus' response to their warning clearly indicates that he will continue his daily work and will proceed in the same way he has been by moving to complete his mission when it is time. Their arrival with a warning will not delay, interrupt or alter his mission. He tells those who brought the warning: "Listen, I am casting out demons and

performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.” This passage offers us the chance to understand that Jesus volunteers for this path and where it will take him. Even though he has the knowledge of where it leads, he is committed to fulfilling God’s plan to redeem those that God loves and claims. This passage also gives us the opportunity to contemplate the meaning of the phrase in the narration of that testing time in the wilderness which indicated that the temptations did not end when Jesus emerged from the wilderness. Instead they would continue for Jesus as he made the choices which kept him obedient to God’s plan for redeeming the world. The options presented to test his commitment will continue, as does his determination. This will not be the last time that the narrative reveals to us that Jesus was committed to the mission to bring God’s reign near no matter the cost to “self”, Jesus remained truly committed to demonstrating what God’s reign would look like by continuing his focus on caring for others; for the building of community where that was the way of life. That seems the message which the first portion of this passage contains. The later portion of the passage corresponds to portions from Matthew which are often given the title of “lament over Jerusalem.” In Luke Jesus expresses a longing, perhaps in frustration that the proclamation he is making is not being received as he desires. Continuing to speak of Jerusalem Jesus says: “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing. This image of a desire to gather and shield humanity from the consequences of their actions is a powerful one. The impression of grief because of the rejection by those to whom he has made his proclamation is poignant. The poignancy of the statement can be summarized this way—“how often have I desired...and you were not willing.” In many ways that is the whole story of God’s relationship with humanity...with us as a group and as individuals. From the first days in Eden, those days leading up to the great flood, the days of wandering in the wilderness after the flight from slavery in Egypt, the days when God sent prophets to remind people of their promises until those days when Jesus taught and healed as he made his way to Jerusalem. In fact, that timeline can be extended over more than two thousand years longer...to us and our day. How often does God desire one thing for us, and yet how often are we unwilling to accept that way. Over and over again, history tells us of our refusal to accept God’s vision where love for others is present and enacted over love of self that harms others. This unwillingness to accept God’s ways and the close relationship that means is the very heart of sinfulness. Recoiling from the desires of God; failing to be obedient to the ways revealed to us are signs of our rejection of God—whether done loudly and vocally in the public square or silently by our actions. Often we think of sin as something gross, illegal and easily recognized and condemned. Something that is done by other people in the dark corners of society. It is comfortable and easy to conceive of sin in that manner, because we almost never think of ourselves in those terms. It’s always so much more comforting to be able to think of “sin” as what “those people” do; those people not like us. But sin is so much broader than that. Of course, much that is sinful does happen in dark alleys and back rooms, but it also happens every time we walk away from what we know are God’s desires for our words, our thoughts and our actions to be. The narrative from Genesis reaches back into the early framework of the relationship between God and humanity. Today’s reading describes an interaction between Abram and God which occurs many years

after that first encounter. When God first chose Abram to begin that story, Abram responded quickly and evidently without questioning. Now it is many years later and Abram is still without children and is living in a land he does not own despite God's promises to him that he will not only receive those things as a blessing, but he will be the source of blessing to all nations. Abram has journeyed far and wide and now has many possessions, but as this passage highlights he has not received what he most desires. The story of Abram shows that he doubts God's promises, he does not always behave ethically; yet the final word on his life is that he was righteous—not because of his moral and upright character but because he believed when God made these promises to him. Sometimes his belief seems to waver, but overall he did have that special relationship with God which allowed him to believe in the assurances he was given. That ability to rest in the assurances we are given, those revealed about God's steadfast love to us as shown in the completed work of Jesus of Nazareth is the acceptance of our place as God's beloved. The faithful Lenten walk for us is to seek out the desires of God for us, and rest under the shadow of his protective love. Accept what God wants from us. Accept what God wants us to be. Accept what God wants us to do, and also what God wants us to leave alone. Acceptance of the truth of God's love and presence in our lives knowing what God desires for us will lead us. Accept the revelations given to us through the gospels about the vision God has for us all. And of course, accept the forgiveness God so freely offers to us when we step off the path revealed as the ways of our Lord. In accepting all that God desires of us and for us we find the very best good news of all. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.