

The Second Sunday in Lent, Year C, 2010
Luke 13:31-35
The Rev. Ronald N. Johnson

When you makes choices, if all things are equal, you are likely to choose the easier way. This is human nature. Hopefully, if things are not equal, the decision maker will choose the better way, but this is not a given. This is true of life, in general; it is also true of things religious. As religious demands increase, we are tempted to find a less perfect, less challenging way; a way without a cross.

Saint Paul, writing to a church he had established in the city of Philippi, worried that believers would be seduced by false teaching; tempted by the attraction of worldly and exotic things. Paul calls upon them to remain true to teachings that are grounded in Jesus Christ. But to stand firm in the faith delivered them will require sacrifice and enormous effort. Christ's road is the high road, the more difficult road. The going requires effort; it requires courage and there are no shortcuts.

What Paul was writing was not new to him. He was simply preaching Jesus. But Jesus made it abundantly clear that following in his footsteps, making the difficult choices, placing that which is right before that which is easy and comfortable often comes at a most dear price. In St. Luke's gospel, from which we read this morning, the Lord responded with courage to the threat from Herod. He would not let the possibility of death deter him from that which he knew to be his Father's will. It would have been helpful if the compliers of our lectionary had included the verses immediately before today's selection to our reading, for in verses 22-30 the Lord said that we should strive to go the "narrow way," through the "narrow door." Jesus was responding to a compelling question. "Tell us, Lord, 'Will those who are saved be few?'" The Lord's answer was, "Yes!" Those looking for the easy way will not become disciples of Jesus; they are disciples of Satan. This is what Jesus meant by saying "Strive to enter by the narrow door." The narrow door is not the easy door. It takes effort, commitment, faith and courage to truly follow the teaching of our Lord. Courage is probably the most operative attribute.

Today's biblical lessons acknowledge the challenge of remaining faithful; at the same time they tell us that fidelity to Jesus is worth the effort. They tell us that fidelity is not a one-way street. In our baptism, we enter into a covenant with God, a covenant made in the blood of Jesus Christ. God is faithful to those joining him in this covenant. The covenant is eternal, but we must uphold our side of it. We must be faithful.

Fidelity is not a given, because it is not an easy thing. This is the point I was making at the beginning of this sermon. Given a choice, we need be aware of the seduction of the "easy way." I think that fidelity is an acquired skill, developed by a lifetime of practice. Fidelity will require that we choose our Lord's "narrow way." It is a difficult way because the world about us keeps us off balance. But fidelity is the only sure way.

The season of Lent, with its emphasis on reflection and repentance and its expectation of sacrifice guides us toward the Kingdom of God. It encourages us to be faithful. Lent reminds us that the Christian life is indeed the “road less traveled,” the narrow way; the difficult way. But it is also the royal way, the Lord’s highway; the only way to Heaven. Lent calls us to holiness and to eternal life. *Amen.*