

Opening

- One day, back in grade school, several of my classmates came running up to me, to inform me that “Gary” another classmate, would be “waiting for me” just outside the fence, near the playground area.
 - Now just about every boy in grade school knows what it means to have someone say they are “waiting for you” and I knew exactly what that meant.
 - “You better walk home a different way,” they said. “He’s out to get you.”
- That is the sort of thing happening to Jesus as we begin this morning’s scripture from Luke.
 - King Herod has come to believe that Jesus is a threat to his power, and Herod wants Jesus killed.
 - And some Pharisees come to warn Jesus to get away while he still can.
- In my case back in grade school, I wasn’t too worried about Gary, frankly.
 - You see, “Gary” and I had had an altercation earlier that day, during recess and as I remembered the situation, my buddies saved his life by pulling me off of him, as I was about to annihilate him.
 - So no, I wasn’t worried.
 - “You tell him, I’ll be looking for him,” was my reply - and I walked home that day, the same way I always walked home.
 - And upon reaching the rendezvous point, Gary was nowhere in sight.
- The source of my courage in this situation, stemmed from the fact that I’d already handled him once before and I could do it again.
- But it was different for Jesus, because he had reason to fear Herod.
 - Herod was a credible threat.
 - Herod had already killed John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12) and Jesus’ immense popularity among the people posed a threat to Herod, who had no qualms about eliminating anyone he considered a rival.
- So in that moment, Jesus demonstrates tremendous courage.
 - "You go and tell that fox, that I have a lot to do for the next few days, casting out demons and performing cures," he says.
 - In effect, Jesus is saying "Thanks, but I won't die until my time comes- and that won't happen until I arrive in Jerusalem.
 - And my death won't be the end- on the third day I will finish my work- I will rise and conquer death."

- Jesus let's everyone know that "God" will decide his course, not Herod.
- Jesus' courage stems not from the knowledge that he can handle Herod- he knows he cannot.
 - The source of Jesus' courage, comes from his confidence that he knows God's plan and it is God, not Herod, who will decide when and where Jesus goes.
- In this story, Jesus also reflects the love he holds for the people he'd come to serve.
 - He tells the Pharisees that he must go to Jerusalem.
 - He knows the fate that awaits him on the cross in Jerusalem, but that does not deter him.
 - He is more concerned with our fate than with his own.
 - He tells us how once more he would like to gather us around him like a hen gathers her brood under her wings.
 - Now that statement and the accompanying visual has profound meaning.
 - During the children's moment, I shared how a mother hen diligently and lovingly tends to the safety of her brood, so I won't repeat that.
 - But the analogy of the mother hen, lovingly pulling her brood around her to shield and protect them, is one used by Jesus to express his love for the people around him.

FPC Mission Statement

- As I was reflecting on this scripture over the week, I caught a glimpse of this church's mission statement?
 - You know that statement by now, right?
 - And if you look close enough at his words and actions, you'll notice Jesus loving God, loving neighbor (us) and living with purpose?
 - In this story, Jesus calls us to stay close to him and he laments when we don't.
 - This a story that challenges us to do as Jesus does- to courageously and lovingly heed God's call for our lives and to change our lives in ways which reflect our love for God, our love for neighbors and our intent to live with purpose.
- And there are stories throughout the Bible that reflect that sentiment.
 - We can see it in the lives of Moses, the Disciples, the Apostle Paul and others, who each had times where they chose to do God's will, even at though there was a high cost with doing so.

High Cost of Discipleship

- Back in 1968, in his famous “I have been to the mountaintop” sermon, Dr. Martin Luther King stood before a large crowd at the Bishop Charles Temple and he gave thanks to God, for surviving a vicious attack.
 - A few years earlier, he was at a book signing when a woman came up and asked him if he indeed was Martin Luther King.
 - King, looking down as he signed books, answered affirmatively and the next thing he felt was something beating on his chest.
 - And before he knew what happened, this woman stabbed him.
 - He was rushed to the hospital, where X rays revealed that the tip of the blade was on the edge of King’s aorta.
 - One slip up and he’d have bled to death.
 - King explained “It came out in the New York Times the next morning that if I had merely sneezed, I would have died.”
- As he spoke to the crowd about this and other threats to his life, Dr. King encouraged the crowd to not give up and to commit themselves to God’s calling, to the very end.
 - “Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness,” he said.
- Interwoven into his sermon was the Parable of the Good Samaritan- when the Priest and then the Levite, seeing a wounded man lying along the road can only ask themselves, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to **ME**?"
 - But then the Samaritan came along and asked a different question.
 - He asked himself, "If I don’t stop to help this man, what will happen to **HIM**?"
- Acknowledging the dangers to his life, Dr. King said that they were not important.
 - He said: "Well, I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn’t matter to me now. Because I’ve been to the mountaintop. And I don’t mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not worried about that now. I JUST WANT TO DO GOD’S WILL. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I’m happy, tonight. I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."
- Can you feel the fearlessness passion Dr. King has for what God has called him to do?
 - I think perhaps he caught a vision of what Jesus saw, as he headed toward Jerusalem.

- After delivering that sermon, Dr. King went back to his room at the Lorraine Motel to rest.
 - The next afternoon, as he stood on the balcony of his room, a shot rang out and Dr. King was dead.
- Yet Dr. King had not died in vain- he had done what God called him to do.
 - He had altered the course of our nation.
- Dr. King had answered God's call and lived a life of purpose, loving God and loving neighbors.
 - And his story is an encouragement to us to do the same.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian during World War II.
 - Now what makes Bonhoeffer noteworthy is not the substance of his theology.
 - Theologically speaking, Bonhoeffer was a pretty average theologian, among many, more notable German theologians of the time.
 - But what sets him apart from the others, was his fearless pursuit of what he believed was God's calling in his life.
 - Despite great cost to him personally, it was Bonhoeffer who spoke out against the injustice of Nazi anti-Semitism.
 - And for his beliefs, Bonhoeffer was harassed, arrested, imprisoned and eventually put to death.
 - While in prison he occupied himself as a pastor, providing care and encouragement to fellow inmates.
 - In his book "The Cost of Discipleship", Bonhoeffer offers insight into the cost of committing oneself to God's will.
 - He writes "[Costly] grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life."
 - Dietrich Bonhoeffer caught a vision of what Jesus saw, as he headed to Jerusalem.
 - And he lived a life of purpose- he loved God and he loved his neighbor.
- In a couple of weeks, we'll hear John and Gwen Haspels share their stories as mission workers in Ethiopia.

- I've heard just enough about the Haspels, to imagine that life in Ethiopia for them wasn't always a picnic.
 - And I wonder as we hear their story, what we'll hear that might encourage us to love God, love neighbor and live with purpose.

Are you seeing a pattern here?

- Are you starting to notice any pattern here?
 - In each of these stories, the individuals involved chose a more difficult path.
 - Wouldn't it have been easier for Martin Luther King, if he stuck to preaching plain, ordinary sermons in a safe pulpit?
 - Wouldn't Dietrich Bonhoeffer have been better off to not speak out, lay low and quietly minister a small church somewhere in Germany?
 - Wouldn't the Haspels have enjoyed a better life if they'd remained stateside, found normal jobs and lived the American dream like the rest of us?
 - And wouldn't Jesus have fared better by retreating from Herod, returning to Nazareth and resuming life as an ordinary carpenter?
- As we examine this story about Jesus- and these other stories, the consistent pattern we see is that each found courage for the more difficult path, by knowing that God's plan was unfolding right in front of them.
 - And that they played a major role in that plan.
- Inherent within each of us is the understanding that life is precious.
 - Our time in this world is short and we naturally want to make the most of it.
 - And we naturally want to protect life, especially our own.
- But our FAITH compels us to the understanding that the preservation of our own lives is not our highest priority.
 - What's most important is loving God and loving our neighbors.
 - That means then, that Jesus traveling the road to Jerusalem, was exactly where he should have been.
 - He COULD have saved his life, but he SHOULD NOT have done so.
 - Because he did what his Father had sent him to do.
 - And thank God he did, because it was a game changer.
 - And Martin Luther King, advocating for equal rights in Memphis, was exactly where he should have been- he was where God needed him.
 - And Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in prison, caring for inmates was exactly where he should have been.

- And the Haspels serving in Ethiopia, were exactly where they should have been.

Wrap it up

- Where is it that God wants us to be?
 - There is much work to be done in God's Kingdom.
 - Lent is the perfect time to reflect on what changes we can make in our lives, as we seek to live with purpose, to love God and love our neighbors.
- It's unlikely that we will ever have be faced with the choice between life and death.
 - However, we will all find ourselves faced with smaller choices.
 - Living faithfully or living comfortably.
 - Living honestly or living a lie.
 - Taking care of ourselves or helping our neighbors.
 - Those are the kinds of choices we face every day.
- When choices like that come, will we make the faithful choice?
 - Will we do what God asks of you?
 - Are we willing to forsake everything, if that's what it takes to pursue this mission God has placed before us?
 - Jesus did.
 - So, may it be the same for us.
- Amen.