

Luke 13:31-35
Faith UMC (Farmington, MN)

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the workings of our minds be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Never has there been a more important task than the one God assigned to Jesus. Never has anyone met with more opposition than Jesus encountered; yet Jesus accomplished his mission. Because of his success in the face of stubborn resistance, Jesus serves as a model of how to persevere. The Gospel reading provides perspectives on perseverance for those times when we encounter forces which would keep us from reaching our goals.

First, **expect obstacles**. If Jesus encountered resistance, should you and I not also anticipate obstacles along the way?

A group of Pharisees came to Jesus and told him to leave the area because Herod wanted to kill him. It is not clear whether it was King Herod or the religious leaders who wanted Jesus out of town. In warning Jesus to leave, were the Pharisees acting as tools of Herod, as friends of Jesus, or in their own self-interest? Earlier, Jesus had angered the Pharisees by saying that some of them would not be saved, while some Gentiles would be. It may be the Pharisees themselves who most wanted Jesus out of the way.

Whatever the circumstances of the Pharisees' warning, it is clear that someone wanted to place giant obstacles in the path of Jesus. He was not intimidated by such threats. He referred to Herod as a "fox," perhaps a reference to craftiness, but also a word the Pharisees used to depict an insignificant, inferior person. Jesus showed no signs of fear in face of such opposition. He quickly responded that he would stay his course and complete what he came to do.

If we set goals for ourselves, if there are things we intend to accomplish, we can be assured of obstacles along the way. The only way to avoid running into obstacles is to stay put in one place and go nowhere. Fear of opposition often leads to a kind of paralysis.

Social researchers claim that the number of people who fear flying is almost exactly equal to the number of people who fear mice. They have found no relationship between the two phobias, but either one can keep you from getting where you want or need to go!

Fanny Crosby is a well-known writer of gospel hymns. "To God Be the Glory," "Blessed Assurance," and "All the Way My Savior Leads Me" are familiar titles from her hand. When Fanny Crosby was six weeks old, a doctor mistreated an inflammation of her eyes resulting in her blindness. The doctor never forgave himself, but Crosby refused to carry a grudge or to pity herself because of a handicap.

At age eight, she wrote her first poem which spoke of her contentment with the blessings she had, many of which others did not have to enjoy. Her poem was indicative of a spirit which permeated the rest of her life. At age 83, she wrote: "I believe myself still really in the prime of life!" She accepted obstacles as a part of every life. If we expect obstacles, we are not as likely to be overcome by those which come our way.

A second perspective for perseverance is this: **estimate abilities**. Perseverance may be misplaced if it is applied to a goal which is beyond our abilities to reach. For every person, there are tasks which can be accomplished and others which cannot be. Which is which depend on the individual's abilities, coupled with the strength and guidance and insight provided by God.

A word of caution: do not underestimate abilities. Often there are gifts in our lives which, if utilized, would enable us to accomplish far more than we presently are. Which tends to be the larger problem for you: "I cannot" or "I will not"?

An honest examination of your abilities, enhanced perhaps by the assessment of others who know you well, can produce a confidence in your capabilities which will encourage you to persevere.

On the other hand, this process of examination may result in the realization that the goal which you have set for yourself is beyond your abilities to realize. In either case, it is an advantage to estimate your potential and abilities.

When confronted with the Pharisees' warning to leave, Jesus quickly estimated his abilities, "I'm throwing out demons and healing people" (32). Then with confidence, he asserted, "today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will complete my work" (32). Jesus knew he was able to complete what he had come to do.

Jesus pointed to other abilities when he said of Jerusalem: "How often I have I wanted to gather your people as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (34). He could have protected the inhabitants of the Holy City from judgments, much as a hen guards her chicks from harm. Here was a case, however, where Jesus acknowledged the self-imposed limits of his abilities. He could have saved the city, but he laments, "But you didn't want that" (34). His abilities would not include forcing himself on the people. Salvation requires a willing response, but sadly, they would not.

An honest evaluation of our abilities requires forfeiting some goals. It will, at other times, however, give us the confidence to persevere.

The Gospel reading suggests another perspective for perseverance: **examine motives**. Right motives will empower us to persevere. Doing the right things for the wrong reasons, however, will lead to weariness in well-doing. It is important for us to ask ourselves what it is that motivates us to do what we do.

Jesus' lament for Jerusalem revealed his great love for the city and its people. His heart's desire was to spare them from impending judgment. He was willing to die to turn people back to God, but they rejected the reconciliation Jesus offered. The purity of Jesus' motivation, the amazing depth of his love, caused him to persevere in his mission even unto death on a cross. Jesus had nothing to gain for himself through his sacrifice of life, but he had everything to gain for others. Self-giving love moved him on toward Calvary.

What is it that motivates you to do what you do? If you are having trouble with perseverance, you could be suffering from poor motives.

If you desire to see a task through to completion, expect to encounter obstacles, estimate your abilities, examine what it is that motivates you, and finally, **evaluate goals**. All the other elements may be in place for you to persevere, but the goal itself may be wrong for you.

Jesus knew what his goals were for the short-term and the long-term, and they were goals which only he could meet. He said for two days he would remain where he was, continuing his work of liberating people from demons and diseases. Then, on the third day, he would leave. "However, it's necessary for me to travel today, tomorrow, and the next day because it's impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem" (33).

Jesus stopped to minister to people along the way, but he kept his ultimate goal in mind. He would go to Jerusalem. There he would die. Others tried in vain to thwart his mission, but Jesus kept his goals before him, and he persevered to the end.

The world around us is always trying to set goals for us, and so many of us succumb to the pressures of society. We want to fit in and be accepted by the crowd, but so often the goals others seek to impose on us go nowhere. When God in Christ takes hold of our lives, we are helped to discover goals for living which move us toward God and the abundant life God has for each of us.

God in Christ enables us to overcome obstacles. God in Christ helps us to discover abilities unknown to us before. God in Christ roots out the selfishness which distorts our motives. God in Christ offers to us the best in life-time goals. God in Christ gives us the inner power to persevere. May we each know these perspectives on perseverance as experienced truth in our lives.

Eternal God, we thank you again for the example of Christ Jesus. Help us to expect and overcome obstacles, to estimate our abilities honestly, to examine our motives, and to evaluate our goals. May our lives witness to our perspectives on perseverance as day by day we seek to live more fully as your people. In the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.