

## O JERUSALEM

*A sermon preached by Dr. J. Matthew Burton, Jr.  
Central United Methodist Church  
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**(Luke 13:31-35)** At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." {32} He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. {33} 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.' {34} Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! {35} See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

### **FORGETTING TO THINK LIKE JESUS**

Brennan Manning tells the following story in his book, *The Importance of Being Foolish: How to Think like Jesus*,

One night in New York City I was standing outside the Schubert Theater during the Play's intermission. The tuxedoed gentlemen were in an intense discussion with the evening-gowned ladies on the influence of Schopenhauer on Samuel Beckett's Theater of the absurd. I was about to deliver a timeless observation that would have precluded further discussion on the subject for at least a hundred years when an old woman peddling Variety newspapers approached. She was wearing sneakers and a cab driver's cap. I thrust a coin into her hand and snatched the paper. "Could I talk with you for a minute, Father?" she implored.

In those days I always wore the clerical collar. I knew I could not distinguish myself by my virtues, but I could by my clothing. I wore the Roman collar while taking a shower and placed it under my pajamas while I slept.

"Yes," I snapped, "just wait a minute."

As I turned around to my friends who were breathlessly awaiting my final riposte, I heard the old woman say, “Jesus wouldn’t have talked to Mary Magdalene like that.” She disappeared down the street.

The magnitude of what had happened hit me inside the theater. I had been so preoccupied with my own status that I treated the woman like a vending machine. I put a coin in her hand and out popped a magazine. I had shown no appreciation for the service she performed, no interest in her life, and an appalling lack of regard for her personal dignity.<sup>1</sup>

We started a journey last week. The journey consists of the 40 days of Lent leading up to the death and crucifixion of our Lord. Jesus made the journey and once a year we make it again with him to remember who we are and whose we are. We make the journey because, like Brennan Manning in his story, we forget. We get sidetracked by self-importance and earthly pursuits. Lent is about coming back to Jesus, repentance and forgiveness.

Listen to what Jennifer Ginn has to say about his problem:

I have decided to follow Jesus.  
I have decided to follow Jesus.  
I have decided to follow Jesus.  
No turning back, no turning back.

When my friends and I sang this song at church camp, we sang serenely, often teary-eyed, seated on the ground with the cross-illuminated by candlelight in front of us. In those emotional moments, I imagined myself to be standing firm in the Lord as the Philippians were urged to do by Paul, who reminds them, “Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a

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<sup>1</sup>Brennan Manning, *The Importance of Being Foolish: How to Think like Jesus* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 107-108.

Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” In those moments, I was determined to set my face toward him. But my single-mindedness never lasted. It was mostly the lure of gossip or boys that sidetracked my determination then. I stopped so often along the way of following that I lost my way. Occasional flashbacks to those times and to the words of that song turned my attention to Jesus, but I have moved in fits and starts through adolescence and adulthood—some time toward, and often away from, singleness of purpose...<sup>2</sup>

We are here because we want to follow Jesus but I wonder how many times we were sidetracked?

### **CHRIST’S WAY TO THE CROSS**

We are on a journey, a Lenten journey, to the cross. Jesus made the same journey but he was not sidetracked. Nothing was going to stop him from accomplishing his task, not even warnings from the Scribes and Pharisees. As he stood on the Mount of Olives overlooking the Kidron Valley and the Temple Mount, Jesus lamented over his people, those who had lost their way in the particularities of the law and others who ignored God’s grace and desire for a faithful relationship with his children. Jesus cries over his people who take consolation in church or temple membership as if it is some sort of security blanket. Jesus is telling us that we must repent. It is Jesus prophetic call to change, to turn.

Sin is not a popular subject. We tell ourselves that we are good people who are doing the best we can, and the best we can is good enough for God. God loves us just as we are. Talk of sin is depressing, a put down. This is an attitude that has infected our churches to the point that I am aware of some pastor’s who no longer mention the word sin—it’s all about hope, joy, grace, and love. While I’m all for those incredible gifts

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<sup>2</sup>Jennifer M. Ginn, “*Living by the Word*” (Christian Century, February 24, 2004).

from God, I'm also aware that we stray. We get sidetracked AND WE NEED TO REPENT! The good news is we can.<sup>3</sup>

Elie Wiesel, in *Souls on Fire*, tells an old Hasidic Tale:

When a man asked an old Rabbi how to repent, complaining that he didn't know what to do, the Rabbi replied, "*And to sin, you knew what to do?*"

*"Yes, but that was easy. First I sinned then I knew."*

*"Exactly. Now do the same the other way around. Start by repenting; you'll know later what you must do."*<sup>4</sup>

As someone has said,

It's like standing in the dark and knowing you have to open a door in order to see the light: if you demand that you see first, you will never turn the knob. Note that the door opens not to more darkness, not to an endless, bitter gnashing of teeth and chewing on one's misery. That would be remorse; that would be the sorrow of the world that works death. There is such a sorrow, of course, but it is not the godly sorrow of repentance that brings life and is full of light.<sup>5</sup>

Repentance is reaching out to someone other than yourself. It is reaching out to God. The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*. *Meta* means to change—to do a U-Turn and go in another direction. The second part of *metanoia* means mind. To repent is to change your mind. As Brennan Manning says, "*Every sin resembles (at least in character) the primal sin of Adam and Eve, which was a closing off from God and one*

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<sup>3</sup>William H. Willimon, "*Repent*" (Pulpit Resource, March 7, 2004), 42.

<sup>4</sup>Marguerite Shuster, "*On getting out of 'Here'*" (The Living Pulpit, July-September, 2004), 37.

<sup>5</sup>Shuster, 37.

*another.*” He then goes on to suggest that we take time to review our lives and examine our conscience. *“You might find it beneficial,”* he says, *“for spiritual growth to move beyond the Ten Commandments and address the following questions:”*

- Have I failed to take the initiative in alleviating fear, anxiety, and heartache in my home, my neighborhood, and the local community?
- Have I had contempt for others: the less educated perhaps, or people of different ethnic, racial, economic, or religious groups?
- Have I dismissed senior citizens as anachronisms and not tried to make them feel their worth and dignity?
- Have I in any way stifled the personal development of another?
- Have I sought to be respected without respecting others?
- Have I often kept others waiting?
- Have I carelessly forgotten (or simply not kept) an appointment or a date?
- Have I been difficult for others to reach, feeling too busy to put myself at their disposal?
- Have I not paid attention when someone is speaking to me?
- Have I kept silent when I should have spoken out?
- Have I responded only to those whose friendship might prove profitable to me?
- Have I blackened the character of anyone by harmful remarks, whether false or true?
- Have I betrayed a trust, violated a confidence, or involved myself in the lives of others through indiscreet words or actions?
- Have I concentrated on what’s in it for me rather than what’s in me for it?
- Have I failed to appreciate what is because of might-have-beens, should-have-beens, and could-have-beens?

Now ask yourself this final question:

- Having made a dismal response to this set of questions, will I be gentle with myself, as the Master is, humbly acknowledge that the Word hasn't taken sovereign possession of my life, accept my own need for further conversion, quickly repent, ask forgiveness, waste no time in self-recrimination, and smile at my own frailty?<sup>6</sup>

### **AS A HEN GATHERS HER BROOD**

We need to remember this: Don't let the progressive tendency of sin suppress, blind, and harden you. Remember as Jesus looked out over the temple mount and watched the Scribes, Pharisees and others move about the temple he felt only compassion for them. Knowing that these were the very people who would kill him he said, ***“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”*** (Luke 13:34)

I opened this sermon with words from Jennifer Ginn. Let me close with her words:

The cross before me, the world behind me,  
The cross before me, the world behind me,  
The cross before me, the world behind me,  
No turning back, no turning back.

Lent challenges us to try. I know that even in Lent I won't be able to walk straight toward the cross. I've tried before. Only Christ could do that. As he gathered so many on his journey toward Jerusalem that first time, maybe he'll catch me along the way too:

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<sup>6</sup>Brennan Manning, *The Wisdom of Tenderness: What Happens When God's Fierce Mercy Transforms Our Lives* (San Francisco, CO: Harper Collins, 2002), 119-121.

to heal, to teach, or just to sit for a while. That hope strengthens my resolve to focus on the cross, lest I miss his teaching.<sup>7</sup>

Only Christ's mercy can save us, turn us around, change our mind, get us off the sidetrack, and point us back towards the cross. Repent and follow in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup>Ginn