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The Second Sunday in Lent

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Against the Rock of Christ's Determination, Shortcuts Are Crushed.

As Jesus walked to the cross to save the world, many tried to deter him, foes and friends alike. But Jesus took no shortcuts. He was determined to suffer and die so that he and his people could enjoy glory forever. His willingness to walk on this path is our guarantee that our path, though difficult, leads to the same glory.

Sermon **Philippians 3:17 – 4:1**

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

The Road to Glory

"It's not about the destination. It's about the journey." Have you heard this before? Many people like to use this motto for different aspects of life. A family may use it after a vacation to emphasize that the memories made along the way are more important than the destination. Or an athlete may look back after winning a championship game and appreciate all the hard work it took to achieve the glory of victory.

A Christian's life here on earth is a road to glory. We can look around and see that we certainly have not attained this glory yet. When we look around, we still see the sinfulness of the world. We feel the temptations of the devil and the burden of our own guilt. But we look forward to the promise of Jesus. We look to when the road we are travelling on leads to our home in heaven. We walk the path our Savior paved for us with our eyes set on him. We look forward to his glory and our future glory with him. But as we consider the readings for this morning, we see some of the rules of the road to glory. One, there will be opposition. And two, we need to follow our leader, Jesus.

As we heard in our readings, both the prophet Jeremiah and the Apostle Paul knew firsthand that there is strong opposition for believers and proclaimers of God's message.

The prophet Jeremiah was no longer living under the reign of good king Josiah. It was now the horrible and wicked king Jehoiakim who sat on the throne. And what was the message that the LORD gave to Jeremiah for this new king in the first few years of his reign? It certainly wasn't a welcoming one. The LORD told him to stand in the temple, in front of everyone, and tell them that if they do not listen to these words, destruction is coming for them.

If I were in Jeremiah's shoes, I'm sure thoughts would be running through my head like, "You know, God, these people are so wicked. There is no reason for me to risk MY life for these horrible people. Why don't we just call it a day and let them be destroyed." I would probably consider running away like the prophet Jonah when he was told to proclaim a similar message to Nineveh.

But that is not what Jeremiah did. He did not shy away from what God commanded him to do. He did not try to soften the message. No. Jeremiah went and proclaimed what he was commanded by God to proclaim even though it meant that his life was put into danger.

Paul knew that there were no shortcuts as well. Paul suffered immensely for the sake of being a Christian. He writes about his experiences in 2 Corinthians 11 and says:

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

Paul knew what it was like to suffer for being a Christian and did not shy away from it. He embraced it and used it to praise and honor God. In just the next chapter, Paul begged God to take away a particular hardship in his life, but God's response was "My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul had to endure suffering and trials for being a Christian.

My point in saying this to you is not for you to go out and look for ways to be persecuted or that in order to be a "real" Christian you need to suffer. No. My point is this, God tells us that there are enemies of the cross in the world. He promises that Christians will suffer for the sake of his name. God tells us that the road to glory is not a "yellow brick road" that we can just skip down with no opposition. No, he tells us that there will be hardship and suffering. And that suffering can come in many different forms. It may come from the world, the devil, or our own sinful flesh. God reminds us of this so that we may be prepared to endure the trials on the road to glory. So that we can press on; that we look to our leader and follow him.

We look around our world today and it can be easy to think, "Wow, things are just getting worse and worse." I suppose in some ways that could be argued. But listen to the way Paul describes the enemies of the cross in his day. It doesn't sound like too much has changed. Paul says that "their god is their stomach." Now it doesn't seem that Paul is condemning these people for being gluttons and indulging in too much food. Instead, Paul is saying that these enemies are following their own sinful desires. They are "following their gut." And when sinful people "follow their own sinful gut" it is never a good thing. In doing so, they believe they are doing it for their own benefit, for their own glory, but it is for their shame.

And isn't that exactly what we hear from the world today? Do what feels good to you. Chase after the things you want. Find anything and everything that is going to fill the hole inside of you. It's about having more money, or a better job, or a higher social status. Follow your stomach, your gut, your desires and everything will be okay.

But it isn't okay, is it? Human desire won't quit. Once you get what you wanted, something else catches your eye. See, this is exactly what Satan wants. He wants us to take our eyes off the path of glory and onto anything that will get us one step closer to a path that will lead to destruction. Satan uses anything he can to get us off the road to glory. And he doesn't only use the world or our sinful desires either.

Satan builds up our pride. He gets us to focus on ourselves instead of our leader. He comes along as we are walking on our path and says to us, "Hey you are doing a pretty great job staying on this path here. You are a pretty good Christian. You go to church every week. You give your offerings. You follow all the rules. You don't need that leader in front of you. You can do it all by yourself." And it's so easy to fall for that trap he sets. We set ourselves up as a self-righteous Pharisee who thinks that if we just follow all the rules, we can earn our salvation by ourselves. And then Satan flips the switch on us.

When we do slip up and stumble off the path, Satan is right back in our ear telling us how horrible of a sinner we are. "You are pathetic. How could you make such a dumb mistake? How could God love you? You are doomed. You'll never make it to glory like this."

And the thing is, he is partially right. We are sinners. And as sinners walking on a path to glory, alone we could never make it. With opposition from the world, from our sinful flesh and its desires, and Satan against us, we could never make it to glory. But where he is wrong makes all the difference. God does love you. He loves you with an unconditional love. A love that sent a leader who paved the path to glory for us. We have one who is at our side while we walk on this path through all of its opposition. We have one who made it to glory and promises us that same glory. And so, we keep our eyes on him who has accomplished it all for us.

In the Gospel, we hear that Christ's path to glory was filled with opposition on all sides just like ours. The Pharisees wanted Jesus out of the area and told him that Herod was looking to kill him. Maybe the Pharisees were lying about Herod to get rid of Jesus. But maybe Jesus' life was actually in danger. Whether the Pharisees were telling the truth or not doesn't matter. What matters is that Jesus knew the path he needed to take. He needed to continue his ministry. It was necessary for him to continue on his way with his sight set on Jerusalem. He knew that his path led to Golgotha where he would be the last prophet to be put to death in Jerusalem. He stayed on the road for us who could not take one step on it alone.

He did not stray to the right or to the left of the path. He followed his Father's will perfectly and carried his cross for you, along with all your sins of pride and guilt of failure. The path of the cross he walked, he walked for you. You rest in the shade of God's arms. You rest under the shadow of the cross. So, we follow his example. We follow on the path he laid for us. And when the road gets rough and the temptations come, He says to you, "Come to me, you weary one, and I will give you rest. Follow me. I have done it all for you already."

And if that were not enough, God gives us even more support on our journey. He gives us brothers and sisters in the faith to support, correct, and encourage us. He gave us examples of men and women who followed Christ on their road and now have received that which is worth more than anything this world could offer.

God promises that when our journey has ended here on this earth, when we reach the end of our road to glory, he will transform our weak and lowly bodies to be like Jesus' glorious body. The same God who raised Jesus from the grave will raise you up as well. And he will bring us home to heaven to be with him forever. He will bring us to a place where there are no trials or temptations, no pain or suffering. God himself will dwell among his people. He will dwell with you and with me. Our citizenship is in heaven. As John writes in Revelation, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

For a Christian, our road to glory isn't about the journey. It's about the destination. While on we walk the road the Savior paved for us, we carry our crosses. We endure hardship and pain. But we keep our eyes on our Savior who walked it first. We keep our eyes locked on him as our leader. We look forward to heaven when this road we travel on ends in glory.

The sermon was preached by Seminarian Noah Hartmann.