

Rev. Kenneth J. Rodrigue
St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
16 March 2025

Sermon on Luke 13:31-35

Worship Theme:

GOD'S OPEN-DOOR POLICY: NO DETOURS ALLOWED

The door to God and the glory he has prepared for us stands wide open. However, he has mapped out a very specific pathway to that door. As it did with Jesus, this route takes us through opposition, suffering, and even death. However, at the end of it, through the open door, we are offered a reward far superior to anything the world can offer.

Sermon Theme: **“Love that Longs for the Lost”**

1. Enemies Won't Stop Me
2. I Will Go Even Further!

If you had to choose between doing something the easy way or the hard way, which would you pick? Dumb question, right? Obviously, we almost always want the easy way! Why would anyone ever intentionally pick the harder way to do anything?! The hard way usually brings more pain and difficulty, and whenever we do find ourselves on the hard way, we wish it could be easier. Nobody wants a longer and harder route if there is an easier one.

So why did Jesus? There were so many easier paths Jesus could have taken while he lived on earth, and he had plenty of opportunities to take them! That temptation was at the heart of nearly all the devil's lies to Jesus. Satan wanted Jesus to give up the hard road to the cross and take a shortcut to glory instead. Today in Luke 13, Jesus faced that temptation again when *some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, “Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.”* In other words, “run away, Jesus!” Take a detour and avoid the pain!

We could debate what the intentions of these Pharisees were – were they honestly trying to help Jesus by telling the truth about what the king supposedly said, or were they making it all up? Were they simply trying to get Jesus away from their area so he wouldn't bother them anymore and they could go back to their old Jewish teachings and ways? In the end, it doesn't really matter what motivation the Pharisees had, because, regardless, they made an assumption about Jesus: that he was just like everyone else, and would jump at the chance to take an easier road, one with less pain and suffering.

Even Jesus' own disciples thought this. They could not understand why Jesus would choose a path that leads to death. He would suffer and be beaten and whipped and mercilessly mocked and then he would die in one of the most horrible ways imaginable. If he really were the Savior – God Almighty clothed in human flesh – why would he choose such humiliation?!

We can't be too judgmental though; you and I are often no better. We can be just like the doubting confused disciples and even like the Pharisees who tried to push Jesus toward an easier path. Maybe we've even thought, “It would have made

so much more sense for Jesus to use his almighty power and simply wipe all sin off the earth. He's God, so he can do that, can't he?! And he made everything once, so why not just destroy the sinful world and make a new one again that couldn't sin? Why not just destroy the devil instead of taking this long hard journey – it could have been over right away and without any pain or suffering at all!"

But that's human thinking – “give me the path of least resistance. If I can do it faster, I want that. If it can be easier, I want that. Give me all the good I can get with as little bad as possible.” But we all learn sooner or later that detours and shortcuts don't always work. A shortcut on a road trip may land you in the middle of nowhere on a road that's not even a road. A shortcut at work might result in compromised safety or the job not getting done properly, thereby making the job twice as long and difficult instead of shorter and easier as hoped.

Jesus knew that about the path of the Savior too, except the stakes were much higher than the time a job takes or getting lost on a road trip. The path Jesus was on had eternal ramifications, whether he completed his mission or failed! Either way, eternal things were happening. And not just for himself or for a few other people; eternal things were at stake for every human being that will ever exist. If Jesus took even just a teeny tiny detour, the mission would be over – immediate failure. Jesus would have prioritized himself and his own comfort over the eternal fate of all humanity, and a selfish Savior is not a successful Savior. That's why the devil tried so hard to stop Jesus, personally tempting Jesus, using religious leaders against him, and even getting Jesus' own disciples to tempt him to give up: Satan wanted Jesus to abandon the path of the Savior NOW.

But **Enemies Would Not Stop Jesus**. When the Pharisees assumed Jesus would gladly save his own life by running from danger and death, he responded to them, *“Go tell that fox (Herod), ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’ In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day.* That's not what they expected from him at all! They had just told Jesus that King Herod wanted to kill him, and this was the same Herod who had already killed John the Baptist, so it was very possible he wanted Jesus gone too! But **Jesus would not be stopped** by Herod or Pharisees or anyone else, not even Satan himself. Jesus' determination to finish the path of the Savior was too strong. There were more demons to drive out, more people to heal, and a Holy Week to complete. Jesus wasn't ignorant or naïve though; because he is God, he knew exactly what that path meant for him.

When the Pharisees tried to warn Jesus of possible death awaiting him if he stayed in Galilee, he told them he wasn't concerned with possible death, because he was going to CERTAIN death in Jerusalem – *“for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!”* It's tough to determine Jesus' attitude behind those words, but regardless, Jesus spoke a sad reality. Jerusalem, the capital city, the holy city of God's people, a symbol for all Judaism...with the reputation of being a “prophet-killing city.” Jerusalem and many generations of Israelites had rejected God's messengers and put them to death. The people who should have most-eagerly welcomed God's messengers instead refused to hear and believe them at all.

Not much has changed since then, has it. As we look at the world we live in, Christianity doesn't seem as popular as it once was. Other religions seem to be growing while Christianity seems to be shrinking. Even among Christians, there is terrible division over what the Bible says. There are as many different ideas as there are branches of Christianity, with countless people claiming to be Christian who slice, dice, and puree the Word of God until the only things left in it are the things they want it to say, rather than what God actually said. Why do they do it? It's easier. It's a detour to avoid hard truths and to have a religion which supports their sin instead of condemning it as wrong.

But it's not just "them", is it; the same desire for detours is in our hearts too. Even though we publicly confess that everything the Bible says is absolute truth and that we believe every word, we struggle with the parts that call us onto the carpet for the sin in our own hearts and lives. Maybe it's the way we think and talk about people who are different from us, or the way we treat our family members and friends. Maybe it's what we allow our eyes to watch when no one else is around, or a refusal to prioritize regular time with God. We know life on earth can be difficult and frustrating and sometimes filled with pain we wouldn't wish on anyone, but there are no excuses – God doesn't allow any detours if we want to spend forever with him.

So what do we do? What should we say about people who follow other religions and worship false gods? What should we do when sinful desires flood our hearts and minds? How should we treat Christians who do not follow God's Word in its entirety or who don't come to church as often as they could? Do we ignore them, assuming that they'll be okay or that someone else will help them? Do we turn a blind eye to our own sins, pretending we're better than "those other people"? Do we spend so much time thanking God for giving US the truth that we don't have any time left to pray for his truth to come to others as well?

Those are all detours from the path God actually calls us to walk. We're called to seek the lost, not ignore them. God's law calls us to acknowledge and confess our sins instead of pretending they aren't so bad. And we're called to speak the truth in love to everyone who needs it, instead of selfishly hoarding it for ourselves. No detours allowed – we must walk the path of God.

What's the only way that's possible for us? Jesus. Jesus avoided all detours and walked with full determination the path God set before him. And he did it for all people, including us! Instead of thanking God that he was better than the misled Pharisees and the ignorant people of Jerusalem, and instead of rejecting them and leaving them behind forever, Jesus loved them. Jesus loved us. Because the determination that Jesus had to fulfill his mission as Savior of the world was much more than a fleeting feeling; it was a very real love that he put into action, a love that longs for the lost. *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together."* Notice Jesus did not pretend the Jews hadn't sinned. He knew exactly who had so often stoned his prophets to death! And Jesus doesn't pretend we don't sin either – he knows it all, he sees it all, and he calls it what it really is!

But his love is bigger. His love was bigger than the sins the Jews committed, and his love is bigger than the sins we commit. No matter what our sins have been, Jesus' love is bigger and stronger and more determined to do whatever it takes to save us. That's why Jesus could not take a detour or an easier way, no matter how many times Satan, the Pharisees, the disciples, or you and I tempted him to; only the hard road to the cross would save us from sin. So Jesus walked it. He walked it to experience and feel and understand everything we do. He walked it to be the only person who would ever walk it perfectly. He walked it because he longs for us to enjoy eternal life and salvation with him in heaven.

Jesus was so determined to finish his path to glory because we needed him to. His love for you and me kept him going, and **he would not be stopped by enemies** and their temptations or threats. In fact, **he would go even further** than they could possibly imagine by going straight to Jerusalem, successfully paying for the sins of the whole world, conquering Satan and death and hell forever, and rising from the dead as our victorious Savior and Lord.

No detours allowed for that kind of love; one path and one path only could show such amazing grace – and Jesus walked it. We were lost in sin with no hope on our own, but our Savior has **a love that longs for the lost**, so he took the long painful road to the cross to find us, save us, and give us life with him in heaven forever. Now we have the privilege of bringing that same love to everyone else who needs it – Christians, non-Christians, people who haven't been to church in 30 years, and people who are in church every week – we ALL need this love from Jesus. And his love is never satisfied or exhausted – he always wants more people to experience life in his love, and he always has room for more people in it. All glory and thanks to God for his **love that longs for the lost** so much that **no enemies would ever stop him** and **he would go even further** than we could possibly imagine – all the way to the cross for you, for me, for all. Thank you, Jesus, for such priceless love. Amen!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.