

## TO RUN OR NOT TO RUN

A Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent, February 28, 2010

Text: Luke 13:31-35

If you are *still* looking for something to give up for Lent—or permanently, let me suggest again, as I did last Sunday, giving up one or more of the *bad judgments* we are in the habit of making. Last Sunday, we looked at what a mistake it is to think we can live without God. The story of Jesus being tested by the devil gave us a good look at someone who, no matter how hard pressed, refused to forget that he was the beloved Son of God. We do well to remember that, also.

Today we will look at another kind of bad judgment. And I don't mean something little, like the time I was hurrying so I cut my leg with a box knife, the day we were due to fly across the Pacific. I mean a very serious sort of bad judgment.

Today Jesus demonstrates by his example what a mistake it is, to run away . . . from our life.

*Some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."*

Jesus gives an impertinent answer to the Pharisees. A courageous answer. "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.'"

A fox makes up for its weakness with its cunning. Apparently, Herod wanted to get rid of Jesus in a stealthy manner, as he had quieted John the Baptist once. But Jesus called the sly/weak king out in the open by personally sending him an itinerary. As if to say, "If you want to kill me, this is where I'll be. Today. And, oh yes, I'll be here tomorrow as well. And, say, like, if you need more time to find me, I won't actually be finished with my work until the third day."

That is similar to what Jesus said to the people who arrested him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Remember? "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me."

For what shall we praise Jesus most? Bravado? Class? Fearlessness? Integrity? Wit?

We could praise Jesus for many things. But let's focus on one. His refusal to run away from his life.

**He didn't "run for his life," because he couldn't run *from* his life.**

**He didn't "run for his life," because his life was right there in front of him.**

**He didn't "run for his life," because his life was a lot more than not being dead.**

Now, there is a time and a place for running away. I seem to remember a very famous, brave saint who allowed his friends to put him in a basket and lower him over the wall of the city of Damascus. Didn't Moses' mother hide him from the Egyptians? Young David spent a few years running away from King Saul; even left the country temporarily. And Martin Luther spent a year in a disguise using a pseudonym while he translated the New Testament into German. And oh, yes, Jesus himself once slipped through a crowd and left town, when they were going to kill

him! Running and hiding are both good, useful instincts. Psalm 78 allows us to say to God, "Hide me in the shadow of your wings!"

But not today, Jesus says. Today and tomorrow and the next day, I have work to do. The work I came to do. The work my heavenly Father has given me. Therefore I cannot run, nor will I hide.

Jesus' work was *that* important to his being. One time Jesus' disciples saw he was hungry and tried to feed him. He replied: "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples were puzzled and said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus clarified: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work."

You see, it's not as if Jesus lacked the basic instinct for survival. It's just that life, for him, was not life unless it was . . . for the sake of others.

This came to a head on the cross, of course, when he actually did die. But before he died, some people started taunting him, telling him that if he was so great, he should save himself. Come down and run away. One of the people taunting Jesus unwittingly complimented him when he said, as Mark and Matthew have recorded, "He saved others—himself he cannot save!"

That's right. He couldn't get down from the cross to save himself, because saving himself was not what he came for. Not what he lived for. Not what he was born for.

He lived, he died, he rose—for us, to save us.

When you and I were baptized into Christ, we were baptized into that kind of dying and living. That is, we received his dying as a gift to us, something he did for us. We particularize that, put our name on it, when we are baptized into his name. And just as Jesus was raised up from his death-for-us, so you and I got raised up when we were baptized, so that we, too, should not have to live the rest of our lives battling for mere survival. Instead, we now *live for others*. It is our food, now, to do the will of God, just as it was Jesus' food. We, too, cannot live to save ourselves, because this new life was given us to share with others.

To be self-centered is to run away from that life. Thinking that we live to make ourselves great and to have everything we want would be as preposterous as thinking that the sun revolves around the earth. *To live is to live for others; to live is to love.*

Now, that is not a simple maxim. Its implications for everyone are different, because we live out our call to love in different vocations and circumstances. But it is still the same. It is a broad command, a dangerous command, one that could even consume us. We might worry where the limits are, to that divine call. Is there an easy way to fulfill that calling without actually, like, giving ourselves away?

In fact, the way of love to which we are called would be self-destructive except that Jesus has walked it already for us, to give us life. The task he refused to run away from was the task of expelling our demons, healing us, encouraging us, giving us forgiveness and life and peace. He hints at this in today's Gospel when he talks about three days: "*I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.*" Those words refer not just to the three days in Galilee, but they anticipate another three hard days of work that Jesus would famously refuse to run away from. He wouldn't let his disciples defend him from the arresting officers, he wouldn't invoke armies of angels to rout Pilate's soldiers; and he

wouldn't come down from the cross, because his work wouldn't be over until *the third day*. On which he would rise, *to give us our eternal hope as well*, so that we might live with his strength.

Those three days of hard work which Jesus did not shirk have left us with an everlasting legacy of confidence that we, too, may live for others without fearing the loss of our selves. Amen.

