

WGUMC February 21, 2016 Luke 13:31-35  
"Lament-able"

The turning point of the Gospel of Luke is in the Ninth Chapter, verse 51. It reads, "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." Up to that time, Jesus had been going about Galilee, teaching and healing and gathering a following. Now, it was the storm clouds that were gathering. In the verses just before our reading this morning, we get an update on how things are going. "Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem." [13:22]

Obviously, Jesus is determined to go, but does he really know what will happen there? Or are we led to believe that he knows because the ones who wrote the Gospels knew? We will never know for sure, but it seems likely that Jesus knows that he is heading for some kind of confrontation. How can you bring the power of love and forgiveness into a city that is

occupied by the power of fear and violence and not get into serious trouble?

In Galilee, he has a good gig. So why doesn't he stay there? Does he think that he will run out of people to teach or demons to chase or diseases to cure? On top of that, some Pharisees come to warn him that Herod wants to kill him. You see, not all the Pharisees wanted him dead.

Their warnings remind Jesus that Jerusalem is the city where prophets go to get killed and that's where he is headed. What comes next is what has traditionally been known as "The Lament over Jerusalem." To be sure, there is much to grieve about. The city is under Roman occupation. The temple is under a corrupt administration. The people live in fear and suspicion. So Jesus will go there. He will try to gather the people. He will seek to cast out their fears, but the authorities will cast him out instead. He will try to love them as children, but they will reject him. Like a mother hen, he will want to

spread his wings over them. But with his wings spread, he will be vulnerable to them. And the denial, the betrayal, will feel like a knife to the breast.

You would think Jesus might be starting to wonder if it is going to be worth it. Look at all the prophets that were killed in Jerusalem. Did the death of any of them make a lasting difference? Did any of them bring about any real change in human behavior? The people are still sinning. They are still suffering. So what would be the point of going there and getting killed, unless the outcome could be different this time?

This is a lamentable situation, and Jesus has reason to despair. That word, *despair*, literally means "dis-hope." Dis-hope is what we feel when every time we lose ten pounds, it comes right back again. Dis-hope is what we feel when the treatment doesn't work and we relapse again. Dis-hope is what we feel when we fill out the fiftieth job application and get turned down again. Dis-hope is what we feel when the grieving

never gets done, and we have convinced ourselves that we will never know love or joy again. And it's not just personal. Dis- hope is what I often feel about the state of politics in my country or the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

When we are convinced that things won't get better, that nothing will ever change, that every event in our life is predetermined, or that the past will just keep repeating itself, of course we lose hope. We fall into despair.

That's what we do, but that's not what Jesus does. And the reason he doesn't is found in that one word, "unless." Unless things could be different. Jesus has come this far. He has resisted the devil's temptation in the wilderness. He has been rejected in his hometown of Nazareth. He has faced down demons and cured diseases and had run-ins with the super religious. And he hasn't come all this way to give in to despair now. Instead, he gives in to trust.

Jesus will go to Jerusalem trusting God to do something different, something new, something wonderful. What happened to all those other prophets may well happen to Jesus. But Jesus is willing to take the risk that what God is doing in him is truly original, has never been done before and we'll never see it again.

What it would be like if we all could have that same trust! If we could believe that what God is doing in each of our lives is totally original, never been tried before and the world will never see anything like it again. But too often we are stuck in dis- hope. It is a very bad habit of thinking that we get into. We think that life has to be this way or that there is no other way. And we can be stuck in that place for so long that we begin to think that this is what God must want, if there even is a God.

Truly, this is a lament-able situation. So it's time to lament, to lay our grief on God, to put our complaints into prayer, to lift up our hands, to spread our wings, so that we

make ourselves vulnerable enough so that God can come and stab us in the heart with grace.

The trouble is that we put so many conditions on our sad situation that we won't let God change it. We have one way of viewing the problem and we think it is the only way. We don't welcome anyone else's interpretations or solutions. We like to say that God has a plan for us, but the truth is that we are waiting for God to get with it and fit into our plan.

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus doesn't have a plan, except to fit into God's plan. "Not what I want," he says, "But what you want." [Matthew 26:39] And God's plan is far more open-ended than we might think. God doesn't have it all planned out ahead of time. When it comes to life in all of its complexities and all of its possibilities, God is far more creative and innovative than we can begin to imagine.

Are you willing to take the risk of trusting that God can do something different, something new, something wonderful

with you? Then I have some steps for you. Most of us don't like risk, so to give up your dis-hope will take some real discipline and patience. Dis-hope can be a bad habit. It can be an addictive pattern of thinking. Like giving up any other addiction, we have to do it one step at a time.

With a tip of my hat to AA, here are my twelve steps for getting from despair to hope, from fear to trust.

1. The first step is the hardest one. We can't take it until we are ready to say, I am stuck in a place of dis-hope. Despite all of my efforts, I have not been able to solve my own problems, and I admit that I am powerless to control my life and the people in it.

2. I cannot blame God for this, because I am learning that when God created the universe, God gave it true freedom and that means that God doesn't control everything. In a free world, bad things can just happen. The river floods, the levee fails, the bullet flies, the car crashes, a loved one dies.

3. Instead, I believe that, though God did not cause my problems, God can work with them. God can take love into and bring life out of the most horrible tragedies, the most heinous crimes, the most broken homes, and the most sorry souls.

4. I know that God can't work with me unless I am willing to let go of all my excuses, all my "yes, but's," and hand over my crutches. I even have to give up my powerlessness so that God can empower me.

5. I confess that, just as I cannot save my own soul or forgive my own sins, I cannot learn to let go and let God on my own.

6. I concede that my help comes from the Holy Spirit working through Spirit-led people who take the time to show me what trusting God looks like.

7. I have made a long list of my problems, but I know that it takes a long, long time to build trust. So I am going to take this one step at a time. I am choosing to give just one problem to God today. I will give it again tomorrow and the next day and



the next day until giving it to God becomes a habit and an act of faith.

8. When I don't receive an immediate answer to my prayers or when my problems don't disappear right away, I will ask God to open my eyes to see what God is doing in my life today and how that can help me live better tomorrow.

9. When I can't see what God is doing in my life, I will seek out those who can see. When my faith is weak, I will let their faith strengthen me.

10. As I begin to understand how God is always at work in my world—even when I don't see it myself—I will continue to entrust more and more of my life to God each day.

11. Building on my trust in God, I will seek to build trust in all my relationships. I can take that risk because I know that no one can cause me a hurt that God can't heal, and no one can disappoint me because only God can fully satisfy me.

12. As my trust in God continues to grow, I will share my faith with those whose trust has been broken or betrayed. I will live my life so that they can see the steadfast love of God at work in me.

There you have a 12-step program for dispelling the dis-hope in your life. I recommend using it during this Lenten season, because dis-hope is something we should all be trying to give up. This is not where God wants us to be. This is not who God created us to be. Whether we know it or not, we are on the way to Jerusalem, just like Jesus. Whether we find death there or new life there depends on whether we can trust God. So let's ask God to help us remove the robe of dis-hope and recover the trust we were born with, the open-ness to life that we were blessed with, step by grace-filled step. [remove one layer of fabric from our Lenten cross]