

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
The Second Sunday in Lent
March 13, 2022
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl

Jesus was focused on finishing his mission.

In that very hour, some Pharisees came to him and said, “Leave, and go away from here, because Herod wants to kill you.”

He said to them, “Go tell that fox, ‘Look, I am going to drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the next day, because it cannot be that a prophet would be killed outside Jerusalem!’”

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I have wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you will say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

—Luke 13:31-35

These are very exciting times for Emmanuel Lutheran Church, aren't they? It is very likely that in three months we will break ground on our new Ministry and Education Center. That is very exciting. When I came here a year ago, I heard comments that these plans have been in the works for 15 years. And three years ago, this congregation decided to join in a \$1.2 million appeal entitled *Deeper Roots, Higher Sights*. We have now finished that three-year appeal with \$1.3 million given. Praise be to God and thank you for your generosity.

We are starting another three-year appeal entitled *Growing to Serve*, and our goal for this next appeal is \$1 million. Right now, we are sharing information about that appeal with our congregation, and on April 3, we will have our Celebration Sunday, where we will ask all our members to bring their promise sheets for the next three years. As of today, with verbal and written promises, some members of our congregation have already committed over \$730,000. That is exciting news. We already have commitments that exceed 70% of our goal.

I am amazed and humbled by the generosity and commitment of this congregation to move forward with our new building. Praise be to God! And thank you for your commitments and offerings. These are certainly exciting times for Emmanuel Lutheran Church.

But I do need to give you a warning today. Even though it is extremely exciting that we are very close to breaking ground on our new Ministry and Education Center, and even though it is very exciting that we have so many commitments already given for our *Growing to Serve* appeal, I want to warn you of a danger. There is the danger that we could lose sight of why we are building a Ministry and Education Center. You see, the building is not the goal. It's not. The building is just a tool for a greater purpose.

The goal is really our mission. Emmanuel Lutheran Church shares the love of Jesus and the truth of his saving Word with the people in our church, community, and world. That's what we need to be about. You see, as exciting as it is to plan and work together to build a new building, what really excites me about the Ministry and Education Center is the *ministry* and *education* that will take place in that building.

Just envision it. I picture that building humming with ministries every day. I can just picture the training and instruction of the Lord that will take place for the young and old alike. I can envision the technology of that building being used as we make God's truth available to people around the world. Personally, I'm excited about teaching a course entitled “God's Ways” where we will walk through and apply the entire Biblical text to our lives. It's exciting to see the various small groups that will take place where people will encourage and build each other up. I am thrilled about the opportunities to invite our community to our campus where we can serve people even better with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's exciting to envision a space where God's people can gather to encourage and build each other up. That's what excites me.

And as we go through the process of raising funds and building a Ministry and Education Center, we really need to stay focused on that. We need to encourage each other to remain focused on the mission that Jesus has given to us. We need to build each other up as we stay focused on carrying out our God-given mission.

If we don't stay focused on the mission that Jesus has given to us, we will be like a man who runs aimlessly in a race without keeping his eye on the finish line. It can be easy to lose sight of the ultimate goal. The Scriptures often talk about our journey through this life like a race we are running. We run in this race, keeping our eyes on the finish line.

Ultimately, the finish line is heaven. And isn't that what we all want? I want to be in heaven with Jesus. So do you. We want to be in heaven with our Savior, and we want to bring as many people as possible with us. That's why Emmanuel Lutheran Church shares the love of Jesus and the truth of his saving Word with the people in our church, community, and

world. But as we aspire to do that as a congregation, there are a number of forces that will try to detract us from doing that.

One is internal. I don't have stand before you today and tell you the sad reality that many Christians have dropped out of this race. We are working with a lot of people in our congregation right now who have become disconnected from Jesus and his Word. There are quite a few people who no longer hold on to what God teaches us in his Word. Many people have become as the apostle Paul writes in Philippians. **"Many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.... Their end is destruction, their god is their appetite, and their glory is in their shame. They are thinking only about earthly things"** (Philippians 3:18,19).

I pray that you and I do not end up like that. I pray that we continue to keep our focus on the ultimate finish line. For **"our citizenship is in heaven"** (Philippians 3:20). Today I would like to encourage you as you continue to run this race toward your heavenly goal. How do you find the strength to keep going? Where do you go to find the resiliency to keep going? Where do you find the determination to keep going toward your heavenly goal and to finish your mission? Only one place ... I would like to point your eyes to Jesus who was focused on finishing his mission.

If you could look closely at the face of Jesus in our words for today, what would you see? You would see how determined he is to follow through to the finish line. I wish I could have been there to see the face of Jesus every time he talked about going up to Jerusalem and giving his life for us. Written all over his face is a firm resolve and determination to finish his mission of securing salvation for us.

Oh, Jesus had a lot of roadblocks that tried to deter him. Last week we heard about the first roadblock that Jesus faced right after he was set aside for this ministry. Satan tried his hardest to get Jesus off track. He tempted him constantly. But Jesus never gave in. Today we see even religious and governmental leaders trying to deter Jesus from finishing his mission.

Jesus is in Galilee in the north. He's heading south toward Jerusalem. And as he heads south, the Pharisees, some religious leaders in the church, brought word that Herod wanted to kill him. So, they came and urged Jesus to leave the vicinity at once.

We don't know exactly why the Pharisees came to warn Jesus of Herod. Certainly, they weren't concerned about Jesus' well-being. They had wanted to kill Jesus from the start of his ministry, and that desire only increased through the three years of his ministry. While we really don't know what was going on, Jesus did not let these words divert him from finishing his mission. He said to the Pharisees, **"Go tell that fox, 'Look, I am going to drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the next day, because it cannot be that a prophet would be killed outside Jerusalem."**

Notice Jesus did not say, "I *plan or want* to keep going today and tomorrow and the next day." He said, "I *must*." What do you see on the face of Jesus as he says these words? You see determination. You see love, love for a world of sinners who desperately needed him to finish his mission of securing salvation for all.

Jesus must keep going! He must go all the way until he finally cries, **"It is finished!"** He wasn't going to let the leaders of the church, or the leaders of the government stop him from reaching the finish line of his mission. Jesus was going to Jerusalem. He must.

Was this easy for Jesus? No. Just think about the agony he went through in the Garden of Gethsemane. He asked his Father to take the cup of suffering from him. It was a painful struggle for Jesus. It was a cross to bear. He knew what waited for him in Jerusalem. In our First Lesson, we heard how Jeremiah was persecuted there for preaching the truth. Tradition tells us that the prophet Isaiah was killed in Jerusalem by being sawed in two. And now Jerusalem would put God's own Son to death. Jesus knew that death was waiting for him. He knew the agony of the cross was waiting for him at the finish line. But he was determined to go. He didn't let Satan divert from the cross. And he wasn't going to let the Pharisees or Herod stand in his way either. Nothing was going to stand in his way of going to Jerusalem so that he could bring the world peace with God through his death and resurrection.

This is how much Jesus absolutely loves the world. This is a victory that is offered to every single person in the entire world. Jesus has secured the victory. It is done. He won.

So, you can imagine how heartbreaking it was for Jesus to know that there were so many people who had no interest in him as the Savior. It just absolutely broke his heart. He holds the salvation of the world in his hand. He offers it freely and fully to all people. And yet so many people just push him aside. And that breaks his heart.

I picture Jesus with tears in his eyes, saying, **"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I have wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"**

It is so heart wrenching to see people resist the Lord and not want anything do with him. It breaks our heart when hear people leave the church and disconnect from Jesus and his Word. It is sad when we see people throw away the free gift of salvation that Jesus gives.

But are we ever in danger of doing that? Let's not forget that we also have a sinful nature that wants to rebel against Jesus and push him aside. Our sinful nature wants to fill our time and energy with what we want to do. Our sinful nature doesn't want to give our time and talents and treasures to fulfilling our God-given mission. We have a sinful nature that also wants to go the way of the world.

Maybe we have times when we experience apathy in our lives. We are just coasting along. Are you ever like that? It doesn't seem as though there is anything too pressing in your life. Maybe you have been tempted to put your relationship with God on the back burner until you get older, married, have kids, or retire. God is placing before you his grace and his forgiveness. He gives you heaven. And he honors you to be a part of his mission team to hold us this free gift to others. But have we ever said with our actions, "Eh, let someone else do that. I have more pressing things to take care of." Do we ever shrug off Jesus because we think we have more important things to attend to?

My friends, what happens to the chicks who ignore the mother hen's call for protection? They are exposed by the fox that wants to devour them. The same thing happens to those who refuse Jesus' refuge that he gives in his Word. Jesus said, **"Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you will say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"** Because the Jews rejected him, Jesus pronounced judgment on them. In 70 AD their beloved house, the city of Jerusalem, was utterly destroyed by the Romans. That is a picture of what will happen at the end of time. Those who die without faith will see Christ again, but only as their judge. They won't cross the finish line into heaven.

There is only one place where we are safe from the judgment to come. There is only one place where we can truly proclaim, **"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."** And that place is Jesus. Jesus wants even rebellious chicks like you and me to find safety. Psalm 57 says, **"Have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed."** In Psalm 61 David says, **"I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings."**

So, my dear friends, where are you at this morning? Are you determined to continue to run the race of being a Christian and cross the finish line? Are you focused to not let anything stand in your way of finding refuge and protection under Jesus' wings? Are you willing to continue to battle against your own sinful desires and follow Christ to the finish line? Are we committed to growing in our mission even if the going gets tough? May we have the same resiliency and resolve as our Savior Jesus who said, **"I will reach my goal."** Amen.