

“Responding To Jesus”

Dear friends, Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus, and welcome again to any of you who are here today as visitors, or special guests, on this first of two “Bring A Friend” weekends.

Before turning to our story, let me say a word about what’s happening here today (on this weekend when we’re inviting our friends), as well a word about a job (each of you) have while you’re here. You might not have known (that you have a job), but you do. (I’ll say a word about that in a moment.)

First, in terms of what’s happening, it’s somewhat obvious, but I think it’s worth mentioning. We’re setting aside this weekend and the next and we’re doing things (a bit more intentionally) to help those of you who are guests (here today) to feel welcomed. And so we have things (going on) like name tags and that little video clip you saw at the beginning of the service. And we’re doing a few things (in terms of explaining what’s happening) a bit more directly (and differently) than we might otherwise. And we’re doing it, because we want you (if you’re visiting) to not only hear (from us) that you’re welcome, but also to experience the fact that we’re glad you’re here.

And we’re glad you’re here, (and that leads to why we’re doing what we’re doing), because we believe we have something to offer that can make a difference in your life. And we believe it, because it’s made a difference in each of ours. And his name is Jesus. And we’ve come to know and to believe that he was (and is) God’s only Son. And he came into this world (2000 years ago), not only to teach us about God (and show us how to live), but to die on a cross (for our sin), and to secure for us (secure for you) a place in heaven.

And so what you’re seeing here today, (as a result), is not much different than what you’ll find on any given weekend. We come together (as a community) to acknowledge our need for God’s forgiveness in our lives, to hear his Word and to learn from it, and to offer our prayers and thanks for what he’s done for us in his Son. And so, that’s what’s happening (here today). And we are glad you’re here.

And now a word about the job you have while you’re here. Because each of us (here today) has a job. (And I’ll keep it simple.) My job is to preach the sermon, (to say a few words about what God is saying to us) in his Word. And your job is to listen to the sermon (and to try to hear what God might be saying to you).

And so here’s the deal. If you get to the end of your job (of listening), before I get to the end of mine (of saying a few words), would someone please have the courtesy of letting me know?

Let’s turn to our story. The story we read today gets at the heart of what the Christian faith and life are all about. It’s a story built around what God sent his Son into the world to accomplish, and one that challenges us with the response we need to make to what God (in Jesus) has done.

Now, (to help set the stage), let’s start with the fact that today’s story comes from the gospel of Luke. (I don’t how much you know about Luke.) Luke wasn’t one of the (original) twelve disciples Jesus had, but he was a follower of Jesus. He wrote the gospel of Luke (one of four gospel stories we have in the Bible) and he wrote the book of Acts. And he was a physician, as well as an historian. He cared a lot about details. And so, as you read through his gospel account (the story of Jesus’ life), you’ll find many of the details (of the story) set in their actual historical context.

Now, it’s not (so much) part of today’s story, but it’s important to remember, (as you think about the Christian faith) that what happened in Jesus wasn’t just a story. It wasn’t something someone (somewhere and somehow) made up. It was a real-life event. Jesus was a real-life person. And what he did (in his life), and what happened at the end of his life (his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead) was an actual historical event. It happened in history. It actually took place. And Luke, as an historian, is careful in placing the story of Jesus’ life into its historical context.

It’s also interesting that Luke was a Gentile. Now, in those days, if you weren’t a Jew, you were a Gentile. (Luke was a Gentile.) In fact, he is only Gentile author in the New Testament. Of the 27 books we have (in the New Testament), 25 of them were written by Jews. Only the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were written by someone outside of that Jewish community. And that was Luke.

Well, today we're in chapter 13 of Luke's gospel. The story (we read) comes from a time in Jesus' life when He had already begun His journey toward the cross. In fact, if you want to think about the bigger picture of Jesus' life, (and its historical significance), that's actually the reason Jesus was born.

The Bible says that Jesus came into the world (for the very purpose) of dying for our sin. Even the name "Jesus" (itself) means "one who saves." Jesus came into this world to save. And not just to save the world, but to save us (to save you).

In chapter 13, Jesus has already begun moving toward the cross, (toward Jerusalem), where he would willingly give up his life. Move back four chapters (in Luke's gospel), to chapter nine, and you find the beginning of that journey.

Luke says (in chapter nine), "As the time approached for Jesus to be taken up, (to give his life) he set out for Jerusalem." Other translations say, "He set His face toward Jerusalem," or "He turned His attention toward the Jerusalem."

Now, maybe (for us), looking back 2000 years, it might not seem like such a big deal (that Jesus was going to Jerusalem). After all, we know the story, (what happened) and how it all ends up. Jesus not only died (on the cross), but he was raised. (He came back to life.) And so (the story) ends up in our favor. It ends up exactly as God had intended for it to end up.

But turn back the clock (2000 years), and that wasn't quite so clear. Looking back, it's easy to see how it all fits. Looking forward, it wasn't quite so easy to put it all into place.

But, Luke says "Jesus set out for Jerusalem." He began a journey that would lead Him the cross. And He knew it. And He knew what it would mean. And He knew what it would cost. And yet He still did it. And He did it because of His love for you.

"Responding to Jesus." (That's the title for our sermon today.) I like to think about the relationship God has with us, and compare it to the relationship parents have with their children. We have a number of parents here today (grandparents here today). I'm a father of four, myself.

Today's story is one to which every parent can relate, because it's a story about love, and it's a story about a love that would never quit. (A parent's love for their children never quits.) God's love for you never quits. It doesn't give up. It doesn't stop.

Now, if I were God, (and I've said this before), if I were God, I would have quit on this world a long time ago. I really would have. (Just think about it.) All the things this world has done? All the things this world is doing? All the things this world has planned that have nothing to do with what God desires and wants?

If I were God, I would have quit on this world a long time ago. I would have given up. I would have stopped. But, do you know why God didn't? Because this world belongs to him. (Your life belongs to him.) And so he didn't quit (or give up or stop), and He won't and He never will.

Just like a parent and his or her love for their children. Parents don't quit on their kids. Parents don't stop or give up (even if their kids stray away). And why not? Because they're their children. They don't stop loving, because those kids belong to them.

It's the same thing with God. (It's the same thing with God.) It's the story of the Prodigal Son. It's that one sheep in one hundred after which the shepherd goes out to look. It's the story of the lost coin. It's the story of your life.

Today's story is a story of love, and it's a story of God's love for you and for me. And it's the story of what God was willing to do, (what God has done), and why He chose to do it, and how much your life and mine matter to Him.

In the story today, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem where He's going to end up on a cross. (Now, do you remember what happens?) Luke says some Pharisees came and tried to talk him out of what he was doing. They said, "Leave this place and go somewhere else, because King Herod wants to kill you."

Now, it's an interesting note in the story. (Not key to the story, but an interesting note.) But not all the Pharisees were against Jesus. (Many of them were, but not all.) Nicodemus was a Pharisee. Joseph of Arimathea was a Pharisee. Gamaliel (in the book of Acts) was a Pharisee. Jesus ate with the Pharisees. He loved the Pharisees. Not all the Pharisees were plotting to put Him on the cross.

Luke says some Pharisees came (to talk him out of what he was doing), because “Herod was planning to have Him killed.” Remember what Jesus said? (It points directly to what was soon to happen.) He said, “Go tell that fox; ‘I’ll drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I’ll reach my goal.’”

Now, do you remember what happened on the cross? Do you remember what Jesus said when He was hanging from that tree? He said, “It is finished.” He said, “The work I came to complete is now done.” And do you remember what happened on the third day? Jesus came back from the dead. God raised his Son as he had promised (and brought Him back to life).

And so, (Jesus said) “Go tell that fox that God’s plans for this world are bigger than his life - that God’s plans for this world’s people go far beyond this little world.”

“Responding to Jesus.” Today’s story (as simple as it might be) carries some of the most important lessons we can learn about the Christian life. Number one: God’s love for this world never stops. God’s love for you will never quit or give up or go away.

Number two: there’s more to life than what’s happening in this life. This life (one day) will come to an end (for every one of us). And that’s why Jesus went to the cross, (why he gave his life), so we could have ours (and have it forever).

And number three: what God has done for you in Jesus, requires a response. What God has accomplished (for you) in his Son makes a difference only as it is applied in your life.

That’s what was happening. On His way to Jerusalem, willing and ready to give His life, remember what Jesus did? Jesus cried out for Jerusalem. He cried out for the very ones who would (soon) put Him to death. (Remember his words?) “Jerusalem, Jerusalem,” (he said), “killing the prophets and stoning those sent to you, how I have longed to gather you together,” he said, “as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”

You know, it’s interesting, when it comes to responding to Jesus, that God will do everything necessary to offer us forgiveness (and give us the promise of life). But he won’t make that decision for us. He won’t force us to do anything we choose (in this life) not to do.

Now, he’ll work in our lives. (He’ll work in your life.) And he’ll do (all kinds of things) to get you to think and to help you realize and to make you see that what happened in Jesus happened for you. But the decision to respond (to what Jesus has done) is one only you can make.

Again, remember the story? There were three times when the desires and the response and the decisions of the ones involved (in the story) are mentioned. First it was King Herod. “Leave this place, (they told Jesus), because Herod wants to kill you.” And then it was Jesus who said “How often he had longed to gather (the people) together as his children.” And then it was the people (themselves) and it says, Jesus wanted this to happen, “but they were not willing.”

Now, put that together, and what do you have? “Herod wants to kill you, Jesus longs to gather the people, but the people were not willing.” (What do you have?) What you have is a picture of God. What you have is a picture of how our relationship works.

You see, God never quits on his people. (God will never quit on you.) No matter what you do. No matter how far you go. There will never be anything in your life that will change the love God has for you.

(And how come?) Because you’re his child. He loves you so much that he was willing to give his only Son. And there’s nothing you can do that will stop him from loving. But he won’t live your life for you. He won’t make you respond to what he’s done, if you’re not willing, you’re not ready.

And so how do we respond to Jesus? What do we do to accept what He’s done for us? The Bible says we respond in faith. The Bible says we respond in trust. The Bible says we respond to our Lord’s invitation by giving him (not only a place in our life), but allowing him to have control. And that (it says) is when life begins to change. And that (it says) is when the difference (Jesus can make) begins to show.

My friends, I don’t know where each of you are in your relationship with Christ. Whether you’ve heard the call and responded in faith. Whether you’ve heard the call and failed to respond.

What I do know is that His love for you will never stop. It’ll never quit. It’ll never go away. God has an eternity planned for you, and he’s planned it in his Son. And, (just as) a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings, so God is willing and wanting and waiting to do the same for you.

In closing today, let me simply say that what we're doing here at St. Timothy's (and not only on these "Bring a Friend" weekends), but week-in and week-out, is something we believe can and does change people's lives. And we believe it, because it's happened to us.

And his name is Jesus. And he was (and is) God's only Son. And he came into this world (2000 years ago), not only to teach us about God (and show us how to live), but to die on a cross (for our sin), and to secure for us (secure for you) a place in heaven.

But he won't live our lives for us. (He won't live your life for you.) But he did give his life for you (for all of us), and all it takes is a faith response. Amen.